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THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

BY
JOHN
LEWIS

ILLUSTRATED
BY
EDWARD
MORRISON

WITH
A
FOREWORD
BY
CHARLES
LAWRENCE

INTRODUCED
BY
JOHN
LEWIS

WITH
A
POSTSCRIPT
BY
JOHN
LEWIS

INTRODUCED
BY
JOHN
LEWIS



THE
ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

BY
FLORENCE MARRYAT.
(MRS. FRANCIS LEAN.)

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.



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THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

CHAPTER I.

' YOU MUST PASS IT OFF AS YOUR OWN '

MRS. VIVIAN CHASEMORE did not ask her mother nor any other lady to live with her during the term of her husband's absence. Lady William Nettleship would have been delighted to have made her way into her daughter's house, and to have established some sort of authority there; but Regina foresaw too well the difficulty of ever getting rid of her again, to give any encouragement

to the many hints which she threw out upon the subject. Yet she always took the greatest care, before issuing invitations for a party, to ascertain if Lady William would be able to assist her in entertaining her guests, for the whole of her social life, whilst Vivian was away, was conducted upon principles of the strictest propriety. How was it likely to be otherwise? Regina had no religion to keep her straight, but the very coldness which distressed her husband and made her so unsympathetic a wife, stood her in excellent stead as a young and beautiful hostess, dispensing hospitality without the protection of a husband's presence.

No one ever had it in their power to breathe a word against the complete decorum of Mrs. Vivian Chasemore. She never received a gentleman alone except it was during an afternoon call, neither did she ever appear in public without being accompanied

by some lady older than herself. The season came on apace, and the temptations to 'gad about' were numerous. Still, Regina resisted every one that she was unable to accept under the chaperonage of Lady William, and was quoted as the most reticent and discreet of all young wives ever left to pass through a London season by themselves. Whether she enjoyed the life she had resolved upon leading, it is not so easy to determine. Her hours at home were passed in a very lackadaisical and useless manner. She had never cared for needle-work, and she exhausted the contents of the libraries as fast as they were produced. She found it very dull driving about alone, or in company with her mother, whose sentiments had never tallied well with hers ; but it was still duller to remain indoors by herself. She missed her husband's society more than she chose to acknowledge, especially in the

evenings, and any lady friend who dropped in to see her after her solitary dinner was always very sincerely welcomed by Mrs. Vivian Chasemore. Amongst those acquaintances who had thus re-established an intimacy with her, was Miss Selina Farthingale, who found the house in Premier Street a very pleasant lounge in the evenings, especially since her father had taken to spending them away from home. Lady William Nettleship was not so frequent a visitor after dark, unless she came by special invitation. Regina set her face against cards, and refused to receive Mrs. Runnymede, so that her mother found it was so much time wasted to dance attendance on her daughter's solitude.

But Selina grew to be a standing dish there, and the proud Regina, who had despised the friendship of the lawyer's daughter in her earlier days, ended by

making quite a confidante of Miss Farthingale. After all, they were much of the same age and standing in society, and it is very bad for a woman to bear pain and disappointment entirely by herself. Regina felt her husband's desertion to be a great injury and insult, and she could not forbear imparting her feelings on the subject to Selina. Thus the original cause of the quarrel was brought forward, and the name of Mrs. General Chasemore came on the *tapis*.

Miss Farthingale appeared to sympathise entirely with her friend's sense of wrong, and the absent Vivian came in for no small share of blame between them. Selina was ready to believe Mrs. General Chasemore to be a much injured woman, and counselled Regina to find out the rights and wrongs of the whole matter for herself.

Consequently, when it happened that the lawyer's daughter and the General's widow

met by accident in Regina's house, it was only natural that she should introduce them to one another. She fancied that the elder lady looked startled when she first pronounced Selina's name, but concluded she must have been mistaken, as they had evidently never met before. Friendship, however, seemed to spring up between them as if by magic. Mrs. General Chasemore raved over Selina's appearance, manners, and accomplishments, whilst Miss Farthingale pronounced her new acquaintance to be the most charming, clever, and conversational person she had ever known. Regina could not join, with sincerity, in her commendations. Her husband's stepmother was just the sort of woman she had always set her face resolutely against, and she only tolerated her familiarity from a feeling of rebellion against Vivian, a determination to have her own way, and a curiosity to learn little by

little every detail of her husband's former life, which, when probed, Mrs. General Chasemore seemed to know very little about. But then it was too late to retreat from the intimacy she had allowed her to establish.

One afternoon Regina was sitting in her own room with a very uncomfortable feeling called fear knocking at her heart. Dr. Morton had not heard until that morning that his patient had taken French leave, and left Ventnor for Norway, and he had called on her to ascertain if the news were true.

When she had informed him that it was so, and that her husband's stay in the North was likely to be indefinitely prolonged, the medical man had shaken his head and said he was very sorry, and he wished he had been apprised of Mr. Chasemore's intention before he put it into execution.

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‘Mr. Chasemore is not usually very open to persuasion, Dr. Morton, when it runs in a contrary direction to his own wishes; but may I ask why you seem to attach any importance to this last freak of his? It is becoming a very usual expedition, I believe, with the young men of the present day.’

‘Oh yes, certainly! and nothing more delightful, I should imagine, for a man in full health. But though I do not wish to alarm you, Mrs. Chasemore, I must tell you that I did not quite like the sound of your husband’s lungs the last time I applied the stethoscope to them. That was the reason I sent him to Ventnor, from whence I quite expected he would return to London. The summer months may not signify so much, but I should say that an autumn and winter on the coast of Norway might be very deleterious to him. I trust you will persuade him to return before then.’

'I will mention your opinion to him when I write,' replied Regina, who was anxious not to let the doctor guess under what circumstances she and Vivian had parted with each other; 'but I am much afraid there is little chance of anything I can say making Mr. Chasemore alter his plans. I hope you do not think him *really ill!*'

There was true concern in the tone with which she uttered those words, for danger to her husband meant poverty for herself; but Dr. Morton naturally attributed her anxiety to her conjugal affection.

'Not exactly ill, perhaps, but his health is delicate, and requires attention. The severe chill he took on the occasion of his last attack most certainly left a little dulness in the lungs. I should have preferred his putting off this fishing expedition till next year, but as you justly observe, young men are apt to be headstrong patients, and fond of having

their own way. But you may as well give Mr. Chasemore a hint of what I say, and appeal to his good sense to return to a warmer climate before the autumn sets in. I am glad to see you looking so well yourself. Good-morning!' and Dr. Morton quitted the apartment, leaving Regina with an intolerable headache and the uncomfortable sensation before alluded to, as sole company. He might think she looked well, but she did not feel so. The spectre that had haunted her at intervals ever since the day on which she learned that it was not in her husband's power to make any settlements upon her, rose up more hideous in her eyes than ever to confront and alarm her. She had told the doctor calmly enough that she would write and try to dissuade Vivian from passing too long a time from home; but the fact was that since she had received those few cold lines from Ventnor, she had never

heard from him, and had no notion of his address. Lord Charlesford's yacht was likely to be cruising here, there, and everywhere, and its occupants to have no settled residence until their return. And even if she knew where to write, would any arguments she could use have an effect upon Vivian in his present state of mind towards her? Would he not detect the reason of her apparent anxiety for his welfare, and throw her mercenary motives back in her teeth? Would he not say that she had made life worthless to him, and the sooner he got rid of it the better?—she believed that he would. She knew his hasty passionate nature, and how difficult it was for him to forgive and forget a slight to his affections. So she sat alone all the afternoon, declining any of the services of Mrs. Perkins's successor, whilst she conjured up fear after fear, and pictured to herself Vivian being lost at

sea, or dying of a second attack upon the lungs, and leaving her a widow upon the miserable interest of ten thousand pounds ; whilst that ‘brute,’ Sir Arthur, walked off with all the luxuries she had grown to believe were necessary to her. Such dismal reflections were not calculated to make her headache better, and when dinner was announced, she declined to descend to the dining-room, and ordered tea to be served in her boudoir instead. As she was in the midst of it, Mrs. General Chasemore was announced, and Regina was thankful to welcome any one who would serve as a distraction to her unpleasant thoughts. Besides, Mrs. Chasemore was a sort of relation, and knew so much of the family affairs that she had no hesitation in telling her every word that Dr. Morton had said.

‘Fancy, how wrong and imprudent it is of Vivian to have joined in such an expedition,

under the circumstances ! So selfish too ! Not a thought of what would become of me if he never returned. I had no idea Morton considered his lungs affected. No one mentioned it to me. If they had, I should have sent him down to Ventnor as soon as ever I received the news of Vivian's intended departure.'

'Ah, my dear ! all men are the same ! They can think of no one but themselves. But this sounds serious about Vivian's lungs. I remember now that the poor General told me he used to consider his chest delicate as a boy.'

'Oh, you don't mean to say so !' cried Regina, clasping her hands in her apprehension. 'I think it is quite wicked that I should never have been informed of all this before. And the conditions of Sir Peregrine's will even were never disclosed to me until after I had committed myself by accept-

ing his proposals. I think I am a very deceived and injured woman !'

'It will certainly be a great misfortune for you, my dear, if your husband never comes back again. What is the interest of ten thousand pounds in consols ?—From three to four hundred a year ! Sheer beggary ! And when you have been used to so much luxury too,' quoth Mrs. General Chasemore, as she sipped her tea out of a cup of exquisite Japanese china.

Regina was ready to cry at the prospect. 'Oh, it cannot be !—it cannot possibly be !' she whimpered. 'I should never survive the humiliation.'

'And all for the want of a child to inherit too,' continued the elder lady; 'that is the aggravating part of it. It's enough to make a woman——'

'*What?*' inquired Regina, finding she did not proceed.

‘Well, I dare say you’ll be shocked at what I am going to say, my dear; but it seems that the circumstances are so very peculiar that they entirely alter the case, and I’ve often wondered of late why it has never entered your own head.’

‘But I don’t understand what you mean,’ said Regina.

Mrs. General Chasemore glanced back to see if the door were closed fast before she entered into explanations.

‘I have often wondered why, since there seems no prospect of an heir, that you don’t substitute one.’

‘Substitute one ! Adopt another woman’s baby, do you mean ?’

‘Hush ! don’t talk so loud, or we may be overheard. Yes, that is what I meant.’

‘But in case of Vivian’s death they wouldn’t give the money to an adopted child, would they ?’

‘No, no, you goose! of course not; but what need to say it was adopted. You must pass it off as your own.’

‘Oh, everybody would find that out.’

‘Not if you’re a clever woman! A woman with brains can do anything she chooses in this world. It would only require a little plotting and planning, and a little help. You couldn’t do it alone.’

‘I could never do it at all. Vivian would discover the fraud at once, and never forgive me for it!’

‘What! when he is out in Norway, from which the doctor hints he is unlikely to return? You’ll not have such another opportunity, my dear, as long as you live. The man’s out of the way for a clear twelve-month, and you have the field to yourself. Why, it would be as easy as possible! All you would have to do would be to go away for a while, and come back with the baby.

Do you suppose Vivian is such a conjuror that he will be able to tell at a glance that the child is none of his? No, no, my dear! trust to me. "It's a wise child," they say, "that knows its own father;" but depend upon it, it's a much wiser father that knows his own child.'

Regina sat silent, ruminating on her companion's words. The proposition was too startling a one to strike her at first sight with anything but dismay. Before Mrs. Chase-more had time to continue her discourse, Miss Farthingale walked into the room.

'Ah! here is our dear Selina!' exclaimed the general's widow. 'She and I were talking over this very subject yesterday afternoon, and we mutually agreed that it would be the most feasible thing in the world.'

'I am much obliged to you and Selina, for taking so much interest in my private affairs,'

replied Regina haughtily. She did not like the idea of so delicate a matter having been discussed by these two women, and her pride was roused at once.

‘What is it all about?’ said Selina, looking from one friend to the other.

‘Dear Regina has been very much upset this afternoon by Dr. Morton telling her that he considers Vivian’s lungs unsound, and that he runs a great risk in going to Norway. You know what a terrible thing it will be for her if he goes and dies out there, and leaves her without any one to inherit all these beautiful things—to say nothing of the money! ’

‘Except that odious creature Sir Arthur,’ interposed Selina.

‘Just so. A man who has neither generosity nor good feeling, and would be delighted to have an opportunity of revenging himself on the lady who had refused the

honour of his hand. It would break my heart to see our dear Regina left to the mercy of the baronet—living, as you may say, on his charity, for he will never let her forget that her wretched pittance is derived from his money !'

'It would be intolerable!' murmured Regina, as she laid her head down upon her hands.

'I would rather break stones upon the road myself!' rejoined Selina. 'And I would do *anything* to spite Sir Arthur, and keep him out of the property; so you may depend upon my aid, dear, whenever it may be required.'

'Mrs. Chasemore has been making the most monstrous proposal to me,' said Regina, looking up with a sickly smile; 'but it is utterly impossible!'

'I don't see that at all,' said Selina stoutly.

'Have you heard it, then?'

'We were talking it all over yesterday, as she has just told you. I know what *I* should do in such a case. No doubts nor fears should stop me, for after all, if it *were* found out, no one is likely to prosecute a lady in your position. Besides, how should it be ?'

'Oh, people tell these things. The servants would be the first to betray me.'

'You mustn't trust servants. No one should know it but a couple of real friends like your mother-in-law and myself. It would be as easy as A B C, if you only tried it.'

'It is not to be thought of,' returned Regina; yet she did think of it again and again whilst her friends were with her, although she resolutely turned the conversation to other topics.

Miss Farthingale was obliged to be home by ten o'clock that evening, and as the hour

approached, she rose to go. As she kissed Regina at parting, she whispered :

‘Don’t be such a zany, my dear, as to let all that money slip through your fingers for the want of a little pluck !’

And Regina answered earnestly :

‘I will speak to you about it again, but whatever you do, mention it to no one ;’ and then she returned thoughtfully to the boudoir, whence Mrs. General Chasemore showed no signs of an immediate removal.

‘I am glad that girl is gone, my dear. She is a good girl, and quite devoted to you, and you may trust her as you would myself ; but I want to have a little talk alone with you. You must think over what I said to you, Regina. Things are looking very serious ; and if you don’t make an effort to help yourself now, you may never have another opportunity. Now, I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you, if you like. I’ll accompany you abroad

as soon as the season is over, and we'll manage the matter quietly there. If Vivian finds out that you were with me at the time, he can but scold you for disobedience; for after all, I am his father's widow, and there's no harm in your being seen with me; but the chances are, that he'll be so delighted at the idea of having a son and heir, that he'll be able to think of nothing else.'

'Do you think he would be so very much pleased then?'

'I don't *think*—I'm sure of it! Nothing sours a man's temper like having no children, especially under such circumstances as his. I shouldn't wonder if all your late differences have arisen from that cause. It's very unfair, of course, but it often sets a man against his wife. It's so unusual!'

'Yes, so it is,' acquiesced Regina, with a sigh.

'Well, you have no power to remedy it in

the right way, my dear, and so I really think you would be quite justified in doing the next best thing you can for yourself. It will be quite a pious fraud, I am sure, for it will give Vivian no end of pleasure, and secure you the advantages that should be yours by right. And if your husband doesn't return, why, it will be simply invaluable to you !

'But—but—how could I manage about—about—the baby ?' jerked out Regina, after much hesitation.

'I'll manage that, my dear ; you must have nothing to do with it. You mustn't appear in the matter, so as to render after-recognition an impossibility.'

'But won't it be very difficult ?'

'*Difficult !*' echoed Mrs. General Chase-more, with a hoarse laugh. 'What, in this big, overgrown Babylon, teeming with its hundreds and thousands of wretched little brats that come into the world, unwanted and

unwelcome! If I wished for a dozen tomorrow, I could procure them all by noon. But it requires caution, my dear—great caution. The child must be newborn, the parents must not know to whom they have sold it, and they must imagine it is going out of the country. Then there will be no chance of their coming in contact with or recognising it again. But you know what young babies are—all alike! There will be no difficulty in the matter at all.'

'I wish I could think so,' said Regina; 'it would take such a load off my breast.'

'If that is the case, think so, and be relieved. I would not deceive you for the world! Now, just picture it for yourself. You have not been well all the season. The heat has tried you, and you feel you will be better for a change. You go abroad with me. After a while, you write home to your mother, and tell her you have expectations.

We post the letter at one place, and move on to another, without leaving our address. That is in case she takes it into her head to follow and nurse you. Then, at the proper time, we write and say that all is over, and a few months afterwards you return home with your child in state! Where is the difficulty?"

'But where shall we get the child?'

'I have already said leave that to me! Selina and I will manage it between us. We may profess to be in Rome, or the Pyrenees, or any inaccessible place; but we need not go farther than Paris; and, when necessary, I can return and take the infant over. You can meet me somewhere on the road, and we will go to some quiet town together, and pretend we have parted with the child's nurse in a hurry, and want another. We will have it baptised and registered abroad in your husband's name, and the deed will be done.'

‘They won’t make inquiries about doctors and so forth, will they?’

‘It’s not customary upon such occasions ; but if you think it probable, I shall have my story ready. You travelled too much, and were taken ill at a roadside inn, all alone with me.’

‘How clever you are !’ said Regina.

‘I believe I am ; but this will be child’s play to me. I would go through a much greater risk than that to secure your welfare, Regina. It seems a shame to me that Vivian, whose whole existence has been one course of selfishness, should enjoy this money for his lifetime, and then leave you almost penniless—and that for no fault of your own !’

‘It does seem hard, doesn’t it ? But I don’t think it troubles Vivian much. He is tired of me already. I am sure of it !’

'Ah, my dear, you'll see the difference this blessed baby will make! Nothing will be good enough for you then. You'll be the most beautiful and charming and angelic woman in creation, and all you do and say will be "wisest, discreetest, virtuest, and best!" I really think you owe it to Vivian as well as yourself to procure him this enjoyment. He'll never be the wiser; and "where ignorance is bliss," you know, "'tis folly," etc., etc. No one will be the worse either, unless it is that covetous creature the baronet; and I'd do it to spite him, if for no better reason.'

'I believe you really wish to help me,' murmured Regina, 'but it seems a great risk to run.'

'Oh! you are faint-hearted over the idea to-day because it is new to you, but wait till to-morrow, my dear, and you'll see it in a different light. Well, I mustn't stay longer

now, or I shall be locked out of my rooms, so good-night, and don't be such a fool as to have any scruples at out-witting Sir Arthur.'

Both her friends had left her with the same warning on their lips, and their words rung in her ears through the ensuing night. What was the feeling that actuated Regina most as she contemplated the possibility of carrying out the fraud they had suggested to her? Was it altogether the idea of securing the benefit of Sir Peregrine's fortune for her life-time, or was it the hope of reviving her husband's affection for and pride in her, and of raising her graceful head amongst the females of her acquaintance, crowned with the glory of maternity (although a spurious one)? I think the last arguments had the greater weight with her. Regina was not so cold and heartless as she loved to believe herself, and make others believe her to be.

The touch of a baby's hands and lips might have moulded her very differently by this time, and disappointment and the natural shame which every woman feels at being childless, had had a large share in hardening the character which marriage and motherhood might otherwise have contributed to soften.

She lay awake all night, conning over the feasibility of putting the plan which Mrs. General Chasemore had suggested to her into execution, until it seemed to be the only way out of the difficulties that environed her, and from being impossible and not to be thought of, suddenly assumed an appearance of the greatest desirability. A few hours before she had recoiled at the mere idea of practising such a vast deception; now she longed to put it into progress at once, and end her apprehensions and suspense. So easily does the evil spirit that divides the

possession of every human nature with Heaven gain a victory over the voice of conscience and still its remonstrances with an almighty ‘*must*.’



CHAPTER II.

‘CAN WE HOLD OUR TONGUES?’

THE two arch-conspirators in this pretty little plot held many a consultation upon ways and means, whilst they left their victim to brood over and digest all they had said to her. For some reason of her own, Mrs. General Chasemore declined to meet Selina at her father’s house, but the young lady was her own mistress, and had every opportunity of holding appointments with her friends elsewhere.

‘Of course, I need not tell you that we must take every precaution to preserve an

inviolable secrecy in this matter,' said Mrs. Chasemore one day, as they paced together beneath the shade of the trees in Hyde Park, 'for our own sakes as well as Regina's—and the chief question is, "Can we hold our tongues" ?'

By which she meant, of course, 'Can *you* hold *your* tongue?' as she looked at Selina with her big watery blue eyes.

'Well, if we engage in it, I suppose we should naturally do that for our own sakes. I am not sure that, if discovered, it wouldn't be brought in something like felony. There was a case of the same sort the other day, you know!'

'Ah! yes! but there the husband prosecuted, and Vivian would never do that. He is as proud as she is! The only danger of discovery lies with ourselves.'

'I don't fear that at all,' said Selina. 'What *I* think of most, is the amount of

good we shall gain by interfering in the affair. It is of very little moment to us, after all, *who* gets the money, and Regina herself was never any particular friend of mine.'

'Perhaps not! but you like the baronet still less, if I have understood you rightly. For my own part I am interesting myself in the matter purely to help poor Regina. I know what Vivian is, and I can't help pitying her. And she couldn't possibly manage it by herself.'

'No! but she is clever enough to find plenty of people who would help her!'

'True! and those people would derive all the advantages of keeping her secret. For there *will* be advantages, my dear Selina! over and above a nice trip abroad for both of us. The fact that it is in our power at any moment to betray her, will gain us a very substantial footing in the house, and a liberal

share in the luxuries we have planned to enable her to retain. As it should do, for it is not to be expected that we should risk our reputations to so serious an extent and receive nothing in exchange,' said Mrs. General Chasemore, with the air of a woman who had a reputation to risk.

'Of course not,' replied Selina, 'and, as you say, there must be advantages in obliging a woman with such a command of money. Have you spoken to Regina again about it?'

'Yes! I was with her last evening, and we settled that we would leave town together the end of the month. The sooner it is all over now, I think the better. Then, if you can manage your part of the business and get your papa's consent, you can join us as soon as it is convenient to yourself.'

'I have no one's consent to ask,' replied Selina. 'I have long ceased to consult my

father about any of my private arrangements, and it will only be necessary for me to tell him I have been invited to join Mrs. Vivian Chasemore abroad to render all that part easy. The only doubt I have is about the other thing.'

'If there should be any difficulty on that score, I will return to England and fetch it myself. But the only real fear is lest your identity should be discovered during the transaction.'

'I will take care of that! I know how to disguise myself so that my own father shall not recognise me in the street. It is to whom to apply first that has puzzled me. But I have thought of some one.'

'Who is that?'

'Do you remember my telling you that when he was searching for Vivian Chasemore, papa offered a reward of fifty pounds in the newspapers to any one who should

send information of his whereabouts? The information came through an anonymous letter, but the writer said that if correct he would present himself at papa's office later on with a copy of the letter sent, to prove his identity and claim the reward.'

'Yes! I think you did tell me so, and I remarked that *I* wouldn't have offered fifty pence for the scrapegrace.'

'Papa told me that Mr. Chasemore was as curious as himself to find out who the writer of the letter could possibly be; and when a month afterwards he called for the money, he insisted upon first having his name and address. He gave some name (I forget it now, but I can easily get it out of papa) which neither he nor Mr. Chasemore had ever heard of before. They sent to the address given, however, and verified the man's story, so they had no excuse for withholding the reward from him, although they

could not make him confess how he had obtained the information that the actor Waverley was Vivian Chasemore. He was doggedly reserved, and to all their questions only replied that he had guessed it somehow.'

'Well, my dear, what has this got to do with our present business ?'

'Because I've often heard papa say since in alluding to that man, that he'd never met with a more impenetrable-looking countenance, and that if he had any secret work to do and wanted a confederate, *he* is the person he would choose. So I thought it would be a good idea to apply to him.'

'Capital ! You couldn't do better ! And if he kept his mouth so firmly closed for fifty pounds, what will he not do for a hundred ? Are you sure you can get at his name without suspicion ?'

'Sure ! Papa keeps all his correspon-

dence papers at home, and I have continual access to his keys. He generally leaves them with me when he spends the evening out. I shall know the name long before I need it.'

'It will be better not to apply to this person too soon.'

'I don't mean to do so! I suppose a week will be ample time to give him for his search. My greatest difficulty is to know what to do with the creature when I've got it.'

'My dear, you must bring it straight to me! I shall return to England for the occasion. I've quite decided upon that. The responsibility will be too great for you alone. But you had better fetch the thing away. With your small, slight figure you are so much more easily disguised than I am. And then I know means by which to keep it quiet until we have rejoined Regina.'

'How uncommonly strange she will feel with it,' laughed Selina.

'Oh, she will soon get over that! But you must make one very strict condition, Selina: that the child is perfectly healthy. Don't be let in for some sickly brat who will die after all, and waste both our time and trouble.'

'Mrs. Chasemore! why run the risk of conveying a child over from England? There must be heaps of French brats that would answer the purpose!'

'No, my dear, there are not! The national characteristics are too strongly marked. A French or Italian child might excite suspicion at once. The boy must be English and blue-eyed. Besides, the English poor are far more likely to part with their offspring than foreigners. See the numbers of infanticides we have and the way in which our Foundling Hospital is kept stocked. It is very inconvenient, I own, but

it is quite necessary that the child should be transplanted from this country.'

'I shall not mind it so much, since you have promised to return to assist me; but I confess I felt very unequal to carrying out that part of the plan by myself.'

The season ended that month, and with the prorogation of Parliament Regina slipped away from London with Mrs. General Chase-more, leaving only a letter behind for her mother, to say that she felt so ill she had suddenly made up her mind to go abroad for a few weeks' change with a 'lady friend,' and had no time to call in Kensington before her departure. Selina, who was left in town, was condemned to listen to many a tirade from Lady William's lips on the ingratitude of her daughter at not having acquainted her earlier with her plans.

'No time to call, indeed,' said the irate mother; 'what a ridiculous excuse for a

woman to make who has a carriage and a couple of horses continually at her disposal ! It really makes me feel quite ashamed of my own flesh and blood. And who is this “lady friend” with whom Mrs. Vivian Chasemore has so suddenly made up her mind to leave England without even taking the trouble to say “good-bye” to her poor mother ? What is her name, Selina Farthingale, and where does she come from ? Please to tell me that.’

‘Indeed I cannot tell you anything, Lady William ! Regina has not so much as written me a note ! Why should she ? We all know that fashionable women have their little fancies on occasions, and where money is no obstacle they are likely to gratify them. I suppose she did go off in a great hurry at the last, and had no time to think of anything.’

‘Very pretty behaviour indeed ! If she

wanted some one to accompany her, why didn't she ask her mother? A few weeks' change would have done me a world of good as well as herself. But I am no one, of course! and never was in Miss Regina's consideration.'

'I am sure she has been looking very ill all the season, Lady William, and has lost flesh considerably. I can't imagine what is the matter with her,' replied Selina, who had been coached as to what she should say and do, by Mrs. General Chasemore.

'Fretting after the gentleman in Norway perhaps,' remarked Mrs. Runnymede sarcastically. 'That is the way with women. They never value a thing until they've lost it.'

'More likely worrying herself about "the missing heir",' chimed in Lady William spitefully; 'though crying never remedied that evil yet. She had much better resign herself to the inevitable with a good grace!'

‘I have not heard Regina utter a complaint on that score lately,’ said Selina; ‘and, after all, Mr. Chasemore’s life is as good as her own.’

‘No, my dear, it isn’t! The lives of no men are as good as those of women. We are much the tougher sex of the two, though it isn’t romantic to proclaim it. However, if anything happens to Vivian, Regina must manage for herself. I can’t have her coming back upon me. Our tastes never did agree and never will. She was trying enough, I’m sure, as a girl, and I’m quite afraid to think what she would be as a married woman.’

‘Pray don’t talk of such a melancholy contingency, dear Lady William. Mr. Chasemore is the picture of health as a rule, and we must hope they have both long lives before them.’

‘Ah! you don’t know as much as I do, my dear. Those “pictures of health” are just

the ones to pop off most suddenly, and I've had a presentiment of evil ever since Regina was such a fool as to marry without any proper settlements.'

'But if he does die she'll soon find another husband,' remarked Selina, with that beautiful disregard of all that is sacred with which the young ladies of the present century are wont to invest the order of matrimony.

Lady William nodded her head oracularly.

'Perhaps she may; but it's not every woman that gets a second chance. However, if Regina does not, it won't be for want of trying.'

With which dubious compliment to her only-born, Lady William Nettleship returned to the contemplation of her game of cards.

But about a week afterwards, when Regina had been a month on the Continent, and Lady William and Mrs. Runnymede were thinking of betaking their wicked selves over

to Boulogne or Ostend or some one of the cheaper watering-places, where a game of *baccarat* or *rouge et noir* is still to be enjoyed in a strictly quiet way, Miss Farthingale was surprised by the very unusual sight of seeing them both enter her quiet drawing-room.

‘My dear Lady William, how very good of you ! This is a welcome surprise.’

‘ My dear, we’ve just run over to say good-bye to you—and to tell you the most wonderful piece of news. Runnymede and I have secured rooms at Ostend, where there’s an excellent Kursaal, and we intended to start to-morrow, but I’ve received a letter from Regina that’s upset me entirely. What do you think ?—but you’d never guess—it’s quite impossible.’

‘ Good news I hope, Lady William ! Let me try. Mr. Chasemore is coming home again !’

‘ As if *that* would upset any one ! Why,

my dear Selina, you know they don't care a straw for each other. Oh no! you're quite wide of the mark.'

'What *can* it be? Nobody left her any money?'

'Not a bit of it! There is no one who could do it. But it means money all the same.'

Selina affected to be completely mystified.

'I suppose I must tell you after all. There are expectations, my dear, of an heir!'

'Oh *never!*' cried Selina, leaping in her chair.

'Indeed there are, at least Regina seems to have no doubt of it, and I don't suppose she'd be such a fool as to make the news public unless she were sure. She says that this accounts for a great deal of illness and low spirits for months past, of which she has never complained to me, and that she is

already feeling better for the welcome prospect.'

'Dear Lady William, how delighted you must be! Do let me congratulate you and dear Regina! I suppose you will be going to her at once.'

'I don't know. She does not seem to be quite sure what she is going to do herself. She says the Paris doctors have recommended her country air, and she is going into the Tyrol with her friend, whom she calls Mrs. Brownlow? Did you ever meet a Mrs. Brownlow in Premier Street, Selina?' continued Lady William, suspiciously.

'I'm not sure. Yes, I think I did once. A nice old lady with white hair. Is that the same?'

'I cannot tell you. My daughter's friends are not mine. At any rate Regina seems to prefer Mrs. Brownlow's company to her mother's. Did I hear you say that you had

been invited to join my daughter later on, Selina?"

'She did ask me to do so—but perhaps after this news she may wish to postpone my visit. She will have other things to think of besides entertaining her friends. And Mr. Chasemore will be returning home, surely.'

'I don't know. Regina doesn't mention him, nor the date that she expects this important event to take place, nor anything except the bare fact. That is her unpleasant way you know. She never could write a satisfactory letter.'

'I suppose her mind was too full of the important news to think of anything else. Everything would appear of trivial consequence after that! But does she mention no probable time for her return to England?'

'Not a word, so I shall alter none of my plans on her account. I conclude, of course,

that she has written to her husband, and I hope he may come home and look after her himself. It's his business and not mine. But I thought I mustn't leave England without telling you of her prospects, though there's many a slip, you know, 'twixt the cup and the lip. So, good-bye, my dear, and should you decide, after all, to pay Regina a visit, of course you will let me know.'

To hear Lady William talk one would really have imagined that she was annoyed, rather than pleased, to hear that her daughter's ardent wishes were to be at last fulfilled. Whether the Vivian Chasemores did or did not have an heir to inherit their property, could make no real difference to her personal interests, but it would deprive her of the questionable pleasure of lamenting over her daughter's disappointment and abusing dead Sir Peregrine for having made

so infamous a will. There are some people—a good many, unfortunately—who cease to care for their friends as soon as they are prosperous. Whilst they are wicked or poor, and can be condemned or commiserated, they are so much stock-in-trade to them; but let them once return to the paths of virtue or rise above want, and they are no longer worth talking about. Selina acquiesced in all Lady William said, although she had not the least intention of acquainting her with any of her own plans beforehand.

‘It is so much easier to invent what one *has* done than what one is going to do,’ she decided in mental cogitation with herself. But the intelligence that the first shell had been fired into the enemy’s camp, roused her to the fact that her turn for action would arrive before long. ‘Regina *has* been cunning enough, I see, not to commit herself by mentioning any dates; so that I am to

wait orders, I suppose, before I take action in the matter.'

Nothing could have happened more favourably than it had done for the carrying out of the contemplated fraud. Mr. Farthingale invariably took his month's holiday in August, and Selina's avowed intention of shortly joining her friend Mrs. Vivian Chase-more on the continent, was sufficient excuse for her staying behind him in company with the woman left in charge of the house. Before his departure, however, she had obtained the address she needed, and without the slightest difficulty. In days gone by, when Mr. Farthingale and his daughter had been closer friends than at present, Selina had greatly aided her father's home work by writing and copying letters for him, and he had continued the habit of confiding his keys to her care whenever he spent an evening from home. One such opportunity had

proved sufficient for her ; and amongst a pile of receipts, docketed by her own hand, she had found that for the fifty pounds' reward given for the information of Vivian Chasemore's address, and signed by 'Joseph Mason, 8, Victoria Cottages, Richmond.' To Mr. Mason, therefore, she was quite prepared to pay a visit as soon as she received her cue from Mrs. General Chasemore. It was not long in coming. Before another week elapsed she had a note to say her friend was about to cross to Dover, and would be ready to join her as soon as she telegraphed that she had succeeded in her object. The same afternoon, therefore, found Miss Faringale on her road to Richmond. She had boasted to Mrs. Chasemore that she could disguise herself so that her own father should not know her in the street, and the boast was true. No one would have recognised in the grey-haired, spectacled woman in 'decent

black,' who took her seat in the Richmond omnibus that afternoon, the gay, flaunting Selina Farthingale. She carried her own latch-key, and had taken care to send the char-woman on a distant errand before she left home; so that she slipped up the area-steps without any notice being taken of her. When she arrived in Richmond she had some little difficulty in finding Victoria Cottages, and it was past six o'clock when she came upon them, and found Mr. Joseph Mason with a chubby child on either knee, eating his supper at his castle-door. Selina felt that some policy was required in opening the delicate business she had come upon, and beat about the bush accordingly.

‘ You are Mr. Joseph Mason, I believe?’ she commenced politely.

‘ Yes, ma’am, that be my name,’ responded Mr. Mason, as he rose to his feet and let the two youngsters slide down upon the floor,

where they clung round his ankles like leeches.

‘Pray don’t let me disturb you! I am in want of a sensible and trustworthy person, Mr. Mason, to assist in a very delicate undertaking, and you have been specially recommended to me.’

‘Yes, ma’am!’ said Mr. Mason, pulling his forelock. ‘I’m sure I’m much obliged. I suppose it’s rockery, ma’am. I believe I *am* thought to be an able ’and at rockery and sich-like work.’

‘Oh no! it’s not rockery.’

‘Fancy gardening, ma’am, p’raps. I can’t take a job by the day, jest at present, because they’re a-laying out of the hotel-gardins afresh, and I’m engaged there by the week; but I could give a goodish bit of time hafter hours, if that would suit you, till I was free.’

‘No; my business with you has nothing to do with gardening.’

Mr. Mason stared. He couldn't imagine what other business he was good for.

'I have been recommended to you by the firm of Farthingale and Lucas, in the City, as a very shrewd and able man to do a little job for me in which I need assistance.'

'Farthingale and Lucas, mum! Be they the lawyers' (Mr. Mason pronounced it 'liars') 'as I seed once on account of a friend, now better'n two years and more ago?'

'You saw them on account of yourself, I think. You received a reward of fifty pounds from them for finding a gentleman they had lost sight of, and signed the receipt for it. Don't you remember?'

'Oh yes, mum, sure enuff!' responded the man, reddening to his ears like a peony.

'Mr. Farthingale thought you showed so much good sense and skill on that occasion that he recommended me to come to you to

help me in a little difficulty of the same sort.'

'Another genelman lost?' said Mr. Mason interrogatively.

'Not exactly. Something is to be procured this time. But I cannot speak to you of it here. It must be kept a complete secret, and you will be paid handsomely for holding your tongue.'

Mr. Mason responded to this appeal by shoving his two youngsters out into a back-garden, and slipping the bolt of the door.

'You'll be as safe to speak here, mum, as anywhere, for my good woman's gone with the youngest to see her mother who's bin took sick, and there's no one within call but them two little 'uns.'

'It is because of the cleverness you showed in finding that gentleman that I have come to you, Mr. Mason,' repeated Selina, emphati-

cally, ‘and because the lawyer said you knew so well how to hold your tongue.’

‘Well, mum, I can do that when I sees fit ; and I never was a man of many words.’

‘Just so. I come on behalf of a lady, a foreign countess, very rich and good, who wants to adopt a little English boy ; and she is willing to give a hundred pounds down to any one who will procure her a healthy new-born male infant with fair complexion and blue eyes.’

‘*A hundred pounds!*’ ejaculated Mason. ‘Well, some folks can’t know what to do with their money, mum. A hundred pounds ! I only wish I had a youngster of the age, I’d soon bundle ’im off, I know ! And when would they require the child, mum ?’

‘In a week or two. The countess will send a person expressly to England to receive it and pay the money ; but the parents of the child must understand that it is going

far away, right out of the country, perhaps to Mexico, and that they will never see it again.'

'Oh, they're not likely to want to!' said Mason, disposing of that difficulty as if it were too absurd to mention. 'The only question in my eyes is the time. However, mum, if you'll leave it to me and a fren' as I've got—a very 'cute and able man, as has allays got his weather eye open—I fancy I'll 'ave news for you in a few days.'

'But how shall you be able to let me know?'

'Couldn't you leave your address, mum?'

But Selina was too astute to leave even a false address.

'I have none. I return to the countess to-night, but I can fix a day to meet you here again. Will this day week do?'

'I've no fear but what we'll have news for you by that time, mum; but I wouldn't like

to ask you to come here, for though my wife's a good enough woman in her way, yet they all have tongues, and precious long 'uns too ! saving your presence, mum ; and if she once got hold of a tit-bit like this here, she wouldn't rest till she'd told it round Richmond.'

' Oh, that will never do ! Is there any place in London where I could see you privately ?'

' Well, that's jest what I was a-thinking of, mum. Do ye happen to know a tripe shop at the corner of Bull's Court, jest a-runnin' out of Long Acre ?'

Selina did not happen to know the aristocratic domicile in question, but she promised to find it in pursuit of Mr. Mason.

' Well, if you can do that, mum, my fren' and I will meet you there this day week, and talk with ye private over this matter, and say whether it will be possible to do it at the

price. I s'pose the foreign parties wouldn't go over a hundred pounds at a stretch now, would they ?'

'No, certainly not !' replied Selina, with decision. She had been warned by Mrs. General Chasemore that as soon as ever the object of her search became known, parental affection would go up to a premium, and her abettors would attempt to impose upon her. 'A hundred pounds is more than enough for a newborn infant.'

'Ay, but you were so particular about the colour of the hair and eyes, that I thought there might be a difficulty you see, mum. And it must be a boy, too ! 'Tain't as if the parties were willin' to take anythink !'

'Yes, it must be a boy, and a strong, healthy child into the bargain. Nothing else will do. So if you think you can't undertake the job, let me know, and I will go elsewhere.'

But this threat was too much for Mr. Mason. He promised faithfully to meet the lady at the tripe shop in Bull Court on the day in question; and Selina wrote word to her friends that the first step in the troublesome business had been accomplished.



CHAPTER III.

‘I'D BETTER BRING IT ARTER DARK.’

WHEN Kit Masters brought home his runaway wife from the Putney poorhouse, and learnt, through the rough lips of the butcher's wife, of the prospect that lay before her, surprise at the unexpected intelligence over-powered for a time all other considerations. Not that the news afforded him any pleasure. Like most mean and cruel natures, he hated animals and children, and, strange to say, in taking a wife, it had never entered his head to seriously contemplate the probability of her bringing him a family. Bonnie had

thought of it sometimes—in the sweet wondering way young married women will—as a misty dream, floating somewhere in the future, but never coming near enough to be realised. She was slower of comprehension than most other girls, and had even never asked herself whether the fading of the intangible vision would prove a disappointment or a comfort. But she had sense enough to understand all that Mrs. Bell's warning contained for her in the future, and as the grand new idea sunk down into her breast, and became established there, it blossomed into a source of the deepest happiness. But Mr. Masters viewed the matter in a very different light. It was a hindrance that tied his hands and forced him to curb his temper, and he sulked with it in consequence. Brute as he was, he felt that he dared not give Bonnie a blow, now that the fact of her maternity was patent to the neighbourhood. The wives of his

acquaintance would have risen up in a body and ‘lynched’ him had he laid a hand on her. So he was compelled to take refuge in bad temper, and he growled and scowled at the poor child, day after day, until nothing but the prospect of what was coming to solace her, could have kept her spirit from breaking altogether. Her women friends were very kind to her at this juncture, and their sympathy helped to cheer and sustain her. All true mothers feel an interest in a girl’s first trial, and Bonnie was so simple and childlike, that they wondered amongst themselves how she would ever go through it all, or be a fit guardian for the little one when it had struggled into the world. But the instinct of maternity is great, and it came to Bonnie’s assistance now. The same consciousness of dignity that invests even a poor little animal surrounded by its young, descended on her youthful head like a glory,

and raised her to a level with her fellows. Her shiftless fingers, which had so often called forth a rebuke for laziness from her old grandmother, learned to sew and fell quickly enough when their aid was needed to manufacture little garments in which to envelope the coming babe. She no longer seemed to heed Kit's sharp rejoinders for unintentional offences ; even his cruel taunts on her slow gait and loss of comeliness lost their power to provoke her. If she sighed one moment, she smiled the next, as in anticipation she felt the promised child's arms about her neck, and its kisses pressed upon her cheek. That any accident could happen to rob her of the coming blessing, never by any calculation entered Bonnie's head. Mrs. Bull had a baby every year, and so had Mrs. Martin, and several others in the street ; and all their babies grew fat and strong, and big, and kicked their chubby legs out at Bonnie

as she passed, and made her think, with quickened breath, of the day when she should carry her own darling in her arms. So the spring and summer months dragged themselves away, and the young mother's step grew more lingering and slow, and her face became drawn and thin, and the neighbours spoke of her time of trial as being very near. Kit Masters didn't like the state of things at all. The hollow truce he was forced to maintain with his wife had the worst possible effect upon his nature, and every time she annoyed him he swore inwardly that he'd pay her double as soon as the affair was over. A dozen times a day too he would give vent to his hope that 'the brat would be dead before it ever saw the light,' and that this would be the first and last time Bonnie would ever make such a fool of him. He hadn't married a wife, he maintained, to have her cobbling at children's smocks half the

day, and be laid up for the other half, and if she couldn't bestir herself to look after his comfort, why he must get someone who would, and that was the long and short of it. Bonnie had a violent fit of weeping over some speech of the sort the very day that her little boy came into the world. Kit had been scolding her all the morning, until he made her so ill that he frightened himself, and ran off in haste to procure the attendance of Mrs. Bull. But when, after several hours of sharp suffering, Bonnie heard her baby cry, she thought she was rewarded for every pain this world had afforded her. From that moment her mind appeared lost to all outward things except the little creature that lay in her arms. She never asked for Kit; and though, at the invitation of Mrs. Bull, he did once enter the sick chamber and look down with a species of grunt at the young mother and her child, Bonnie never raised her eyes to his during the

interview, but cuddled her little one closely to her breast, as though she feared that the glance of its father's evil eye might blight and wither it, as it had blighted all the happiness of her own heart.

It was at this period that Mrs. Bull made the round of the neighbours' houses in the little street in Drury Lane, giving it out as her opinion that Kit Masters was just the 'most unnatural ill-feelin' creetur' she had ever met with.

'D'ye think he's took that poor babby in 'is arms, or even so much as noticed it, Mrs. Martin,' she said to the sympathising cobbler's wife. 'Not 'e—the brute! 'E'd never 'ave entered the room if I hadn't kind of shoved 'im in. And then 'e 'adn't a word to say to the poor dear—not of thanks, nor nuffin. And 'e does nought but worrit 'er. If that poor innercent hopens 'is mouth even, 'e's down upon 'em both, and screamin' to 'er to

shet 'im up; and 'e grumbles at 'er bein' hupstairs and not fit to work, as if a gal could be down and about when her babby's not four days old. Lor'! Mrs. Martin, ma'am, I'm sure I often cussed Bull in my 'art at sich times, and I dessay you've done the same by your'n, but I'll never do it agen, not if I lives to make up my baker's dozen. But Bonnie don't seem to take no notice of 'is goin's on, that's one comfort! She lies there all day, smilin' at the young 'un, and talkin' and cooin' to it, while 'e's a-swearin' and cussin' down below, and a-wishin' they was both underground, till 'twould make your blood cuddle in your veins to listen to 'im.'

'I wonder it don't kill the pore gal!' ejaculated Mrs. Martin, who had had her share of connubial cuffing and abuse.

'Bless you! she don't seem even to hear it! She's as wrapt up in her boy as a cat over her kitten.'

'Bonnie was always a bit soft,' remarked the cobbler's wife. 'I doubt whether she'll make a good mother.'

'Let 'er alone! she'll do well enuff, I warrant. There ain't too much love in this world, Mrs. Martin, and it's no use blamin' them as can feel it. But I pities the poor child when 'e gets old enuff for a whippin'.'

And meanwhile, Bonnie, ignorant and fearless of danger, lay in her bed and cooed to her new-found son.

* * * * *

On the day and at the hour appointed, Selina Farthingale found her way to the tripe-shop at the corner of Bull Court, and met Mr. Joseph Mason and his friend. She did not like the air of mystery and mutual understanding with which the blowsy mistress of the tripe-shop ushered her into the greasy back parlour, nor the looks of the 'cute' gentleman (no less an one than Mr. Kit

Masters) to whom Mr. Mason introduced her; but she remembered for her comfort that she was effectually disguised, and that if the interview resulted in nothing she would not be compromised. So she tried to make herself as affable as possible under the circumstances. The whole of the concocted story which she had told Mr. Mason had to be gone through again for the benefit of Mr. Masters, who listened to it with one eye closed and a huge stick thrust into his mouth.

'One hundred pounds!' he repeated, as his friend had done before him. 'And you're authorised to pay that theer sum down on the nail, mum, if so be you can get what you want?'

'Just so! The money is at home, safe enough, and when the infant is handed over I shall pay it down in cash.'

Kit Masters drew a long breath of relief.

'I knows the kid as will suit to a T,' he said, slapping his thighs with his hand.

'Do you really? Is it a boy? How old is it? Has it blue eyes and a fair skin?'

'It's heverythink as you could desire, mum, and 'ealthy as can be—screams like a two-year-old: I ought to know for it lives close anigh my 'ouse.'

'And do you think the parents can be persuaded to part with it? It must be for ever, remember!'

'I knows the father, and I fancy 'e'll listen to reason fast enuff. But if I brings you the child, mum—say to-morrer arternoon, to this ere place—will you guarantee to have the shiners with you, and make a fair exchange?'

'Certainly I will! I shall not expect to have the child unless I do! But—but—will it make a great noise, do you think? Will it be much noticed as I carry it through the street?'

Kit Masters laughed hoarsely.

'I'll take care it shan't trouble you, mum.
It shall have a drop of summat to quiet it
afore it comes 'ere.'

'Oh! mind you don't hurt it!'

'Never you fear! The youngster as I've
got my heye on won't kick for a drop of gin,
I'll warrant that! But I'd better bring it
arter dusk. What do you say, mum, to
eight o'clock sharp to-morrer evening in this
werry place?'

'I will be sure to be here,' replied Selina,
who, now that she had really accomplished
her purpose, felt very nervous about the
issue.

'Twenty-five of them shiners is for me,
Kit,' observed Joe Mason confidentially, as
the two men shuffled out of her presence.

'Well, I s'pose they must be as that was
our bargain; though it's a deal too much for
your share of the job.'

'You'd never 'ave 'eard of it if it 'adn't been for me,' observed Mr. Mason, aggrievedly.

'True for you, old feller, and you managed the other business neat enuff, and so we'll say no more about this one. A hundred pounds! Fancy that! Blest if I ever thought a family was sich a paying consarn before!'

Selina telegraphed at once to her friend Mrs. General Chasemore, who was lurking about Dover, to come up to London, and the next afternoon they met in the now-deserted park. But Mrs. Chasemore refused to accompany the younger lady to Bull Court.

'I'll meet you in the Charing Cross waiting-room or anywhere you like, my dear, but the less we are seen together the better for both of us. Now! don't be nervous, Selina. All you have to do is to carry a good-sized shawl with you, and wrap the child well in it. An

infant of a few days old makes a very small bundle after all, and no one will notice you if you just walk quietly through the street.'

'And as soon as I reach you, you will take it off my hands?'

'Completely! I have had babies of my own, remember, and know how to manage them. I have already told my landlady that I have been called away to the lying-in bed of a daughter who is in extreme peril. When I return with an infant in my arms and say the poor mother's dead, she'll only think I have naturally taken charge of my own grandchild. Trust me, my dear, for making my story good.'

'And shall you leave England to-morrow?'

'Yes! by the first boat. If any one questions me I shall maintain the same story as I have told the landlady; but unless specially unlucky I am not likely to meet any one I know. From Calais I shall travel

at once to Normandy, where I have left Regina at a very out-of-the-way place to wait my return.'

'And then?'

'Then comes the most difficult part, my dear, but I have no fear of failure. I shall smuggle the infant amongst my wraps into the inn bedroom, and there keep it quiet—'

'But how?'

'(Oh! there are ways and means, trust me!) until the middle of the night, when it may yell if it likes. The rough people of the inn are not likely to wake. If they do and come to the door, I shall say madam is very ill and I cannot leave her to admit them. The next morning I shall announce that she has had a child. If they propose medical aid or assistance, I shall say I intend to nurse her myself. I have everything ready and prepared to deceive them, my dear. There is not a link in the chain

missing, and they have been already informed that such an event is expected, and that I am in great fear lest it should happen prematurely.'

'Shall you stay there long ?'

'Only for a fortnight or so, and then move on to the South of France where we can procure a nurse for the infant and tell what story we like. I have gone over the business again and again and cannot see any chance of failure. The most important thing is to keep Lady William in ignorance of the event till the infant is some weeks old, and I have arranged for that also.'

'How will you manage it? She will be so awfully offended if she does not get the very first intelligence.'

'I shall write after a few weeks and give her all the details, and say that Regina was wandering for the first fortnight and quite unable to tell me her mother's address, and

my head was so completely addled with fear and anxiety that I couldn't think of any plan by which to procure it. At the same time we shall have the infant baptised and the birth announced in all the papers, so that the news may reach Mr. Vivian, for his wife has no idea of his address.'

'Papa may have! He is Mr. Chasemore's solicitor, you know, but I have not heard him mention it.'

'Well, my dear! it will be time enough to ask when we require it. As soon as I reach Regina again, I shall telegraph to you to put off your visit without assigning a reason. This will raise curiosity, and pave the way for what will follow. Then when we reach the South of France, you will join us as arranged.'

'I understand perfectly. And now, as it is close upon the time of appointment, I had better go and fetch this important baby.'

What do I look like Mrs. Chasemore? Would any one recognise me?"

'I'd defy them to do it! Your grey wig and spectacles give you the appearance of a woman of sixty. I should say you were a respectable head-nurse if I were asked. And your veil is so thick it completely hides your features. Have you got the notes?'

'Safe in my purse. Shall we go together as far as the Charing Cross station?'

'Yes! there will be no harm in that! But take care these men don't follow you or set some one to do so. If you have any suspicion of it, come straight to the waiting-room and tell me, and we'll shape our course accordingly.'

'I fancy they are honest in their way,' said Selina, 'and would scarcely like, any more than ourselves, to be mixed up publicly in such a transaction.'

'Very good! but you cannot be too

cautious. They might have a dozen reasons for not wishing to lose sight of you. But if they watch you to the station and I take the child, it will be easy enough for you to make such changes in the waiting-room as shall prevent their recognising you as you go out again.'

'I have provided for that,' replied Selina, as she held up a hand-bag, containing a few necessaries to alter her appearance.

Kit Masters and Joe Mason were punctual to their appointment, and as Selina entered the back parlour of the tripe shop, the former rose to his feet and opened a bundle which he carried in his arms. Miss Farthingale was no judge of new-born babies, but as she examined the little creature breathing peacefully beneath the flaring gaslight she could not help seeing that it was a healthy-looking pinky thing, with two red fists doubled up in

its mouth and a head covered with a species of fluffy tow.

‘Theer ’e is, mum, as fine a babby as you’d see on a summer’s day, honly four days’ hold —straight-limbed, good lungs, quiet sleeper, and with a monstrous happetite. I warrant ’e’ll turn out a credit to any party as takes keer on ’im and gives ’im plenty to heat.’

Mr. Masters spoke as if the baby were a dog or any other animal for sale, and, to do him justice, his own education and breeding had not been such as to enable him to regard it in any higher light.

‘I see—a very nice little baby. Here is the money, and I’d better take him before he wakes up and cries,’ said Selina nervously.

‘Don’t you be afraid, mum,’ replied Kit Masters, ‘’e’s safe for the next two hours. I give ’im a drop of daffy to soothe ’im off afore I came.’

He carried the roll of bank-notes to the gaslight, and counted them deliberately.

'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, height, nine, ten—ten ten's a hundred! Thanky, mum, it's hall right and the bargain's complete.'

He placed the sleeping infant in her arms as he spoke, and with a rough jerk to his cap, in which act of courtesy he was followed by his friend, slunk out of the room as if well ashamed of himself, as indeed he had need to be.

Selina wrapped the plaid shawl she had carried over her arm, all round the rather dirty bundle which she had just covenanted for, and, with a palpitating heart, passed out into the open air. But she need not have been alarmed. The tripe shop was full of customers, and no one even looked up at her as she brushed by them, nor noticed what she was carrying. She glanced right and

left as she gained the pavement, but could see nothing of the men who had just left her, and so she hailed the first cab that she met, and jumping in was driven to the Charing Cross station. There, in the waiting-room, was Mrs. General Chasemore, but they met without any bustle as they had agreed upon.

‘All right?’ whispered Mrs. Chasemore, as they sat down side by side in a remote corner of the large room.

‘Quite right! Here it is! Take it. I want to go into the dressing-room before any one notices me.’

She placed the child on her friend’s lap, and passed at once into the inner apartment. None of the passengers had had time to look at her, and, when she emerged again, she was completely altered. The grey wig, spectacles, and veil, were in her hand-bag. Several artificial roses had been hastily pinned in her

bonnet, a crimson tie was knotted round her throat, and she was Selina Farthingale again. Leaving the station thus attired and without the child, it would have been a clever scout who would have known her for the elderly woman who had completed the bargain in the tripe shop.

‘ You’d better keep these,’ she whispered, putting her bag into Mrs. General Chase more’s hand. ‘ They may be useful to you while crossing to-morrow.’

‘ You sharp girl ! So they will ! But I must go back to my lodgings now and see if I can get some assistance for the night with this little wretch. I shall be worn out else.’

‘ Will it be safe ?’

‘ Quite so ! The landlady only knows me as Mrs. Jackson, and this will be my grandchild—my poor dear daughter’s last gift to me. I forgot to get an onion though for the

weeping business. Do I look altogether too jolly for a bereaved mother ?'

' You don't look a bit like yourself,' rejoined Selina, and indeed it was true, for Mrs. General Chasemore had also smoothed down her curling front of golden hair and rubbed the rouge off her cheeks and otherwise tried to make herself look as respectable as she could, which, when done, was not much.

The confederates then parted, and Selina Farthingale, with a much lightened heart, returned in her own character to her father's house.

* * * * *

On that very afternoon, about five o'clock, Mrs. Bull had stepped over to Masters' to see how her patient was getting on, and if she were ready for her tea. She found Bonnie very happy and comfortable, lying in

bed with her little boy, but apparently not much disposed to partake of her usual meal.

'This will never do,' cried Mrs. Bull authoritatively. 'You should be gettin' up a fine happetite now, Bonnie, and 'ow do you think that theer boy's a-goin' to thrive if you don't relish your vittels. Come now, let me raise you a bit, and jest you eat your bread and butter and drink your tea. I can't leave you for the night till you've taken nourishment.'

'But I'm so sleepy,' replied Bonnie with half closed, heavy lidded eyes, but a smile of conientment over her face the while that seemed to say she cared for nothing but to lie there and be happy. 'I don't know how it is, but I feel as if I couldn't raise my head for ever so. And baby seems amost as bad.'

'What have you bin a havin' since I was

here, then?' demanded her friend suspiciously.

'Nothin' but a drink of milk. Kit came home about an hour ago and give it me. And a drop of the medicine the doctor left for me. He said I'd better take it'

'Then I wish as Kit would be a mindin' of 'is own business, for theer was no call for you to take more of that stuff, and if physic ain't wanted it's worse than none. Don't you be persuaded to drink any more on it. *I'll* tell you if it's necessary.'

'No, I won't drink any more,' said Bonnie in a drowsy tone.

'Ow's the youngster gettin' on?'

The girl roused herself a little at this question.

'Oh, beautiful! Just see how his hair's a-growing—quite yaller like mine! And I've found sich a funny little thing on his ear! Look, now! Jest like a pea, ain't it?' and

she turned the child round, and showed the mark, as she spoke.

‘So it be,’ acquiesced Mrs. Bull. ‘That’s curous, too, for I mind Mrs. Martin’s youngest but one havin’ jist sich another, only her’n was red colour, and this is white. That’s what we call a “pig’s ear” down our part of the country, Bonnie. ’E’ll be a glutton, that boy of yourn, as sure as ’e lives !’

‘He’s a little glutton already,’ said the proud young mother, as she folded him to her breast. ‘But it’s more than I feels to-night, Mrs. Bull. I couldn’t touch that tea for ever so. It quite makes me sick to look at it !’

‘Well, I’m disappointed, that’s what I am ! and you gettin’ on so nicely, too ! I think we must give you a little more hair to-morrer, Bonnie. This room’s unkimmon close, and has a queer physicky smell about it. I can’t stay with you longer now ’cause Bull’s wait-

ing for his tea; but Masters will be in afore long, and if you can relish summat afore you goes to sleep for the night, 'e must get it for you.'

'All right!' said Bonnie inarticulately, as her friend rose to leave the room.

'Well, they're main sleepy, the pair on 'em,' thought Mrs. Bull, as she returned to her lord and master. 'However, 'tis as good as food for 'em, any day.'

She heard no more of Bonnie or her goings-on that evening, and concluded all was right with her little neighbour. But as she and Bull, after a hard day's work of selling and buying and cleaning up, were about to retire to their well-earned rest, they were startled by hearing a long piercing scream proceed from a house close by. Drunken cries and brawls were very common, as has been said before, in that dirty little street; but there was something in the tone of this

that arrested Mrs. Bull's hand on its way with a hair-brush to the back of her head.

'Bull!' she exclaimed, 'whatever is that?'

'Dunno, I'm sure, Hann. Public'ouse bein' turned out, maybe'

'No, that ain't a drinkin' voice—its fear. Throw me over my gownd agen, Bull, for, as sure as my name's Hann, that scream came from Bonnie.'

'From Masters' gal? Don't you be foolish, now! You're never a-goin' out agen at this time o' night?'

'But I ham. Theer's summat wrong over theer, I'm sure on it; and I can't rest till I go and see. Come with me, Bull, for the love of God!'

The woman was so excited that her husband caught the infection of her fear, and ran across the street with her to Kit Masters' house. But the first person they encountered

was that gentleman himself, standing serenely on the threshold of his domain.

‘Whatever is the matter with Bonnie, Masters?’ exclaimed Mrs. Bull, breathlessly. ‘I ‘eerd her voice right over to our ‘ouse. What have you bin a-doin’ to ‘er?’

‘I ain’t done nothin’,’ returned the man sullenly; ‘but she’s took with one of ‘er fits of boltin’ agen, and gone down the street like a madwoman.’

‘Gone down the street!’ cried Mrs. Bull, ‘and at this time o’ night! Mercy on us! What had she on?’

‘Precious little, I fancy, except a cloak. She flew out of the ‘ouse afore I could catch ‘er.’

‘She must be out of ‘er mind haltogether. And to leave the poor babe, too! Where is it?’

‘Oh, *that* ain’t heer.’

‘Ain’t heer! The babby gone? Why,

who's took it? Masters, you've 'ad a 'and in all this, I can see, and you'd better make a clean breast of it, if you don't wants to have the perlice set arter you.'

'The perlice! What are you allays stuffin' the perlice down my throat for? Can't a man do what 'e likes with 'is own? If you wants to know the truth, here it is. I can't stand the noise and the bother of a brat a-squealing in my ears night and day, and so I've put the youngster out to nuss; and Bonnie she chose to take on about it and cheek me, and then she bolted down the street afore I could stop 'er.'

'And right, too, if you've robbed 'er of 'er babby. What call 'ad you to take a four-days' old creature out of its mother's breast to turn it over to strangers? Ugh! you unnatural beast! And maybe you've killed 'em both, for it's my belief Bonnie will never get over sich a trubble.'

‘Can’t ‘elp it, if she don’t. She’s gone a nice way to kill ’erself now ; but she allays was a fool !’

‘And ain’t you a-goin’ arter ’er ?

‘Wheer’s the good ? I suppose when she’s tired of runnin’ she’ll come ‘ome agen.’

‘If she ain’t brought ‘ome on a stretcher—though much you’d keer if she was ! Wheer’s the child now ?’

‘Ah, don’t you wish I may tell yer ! so that she might go a-botherin’ arter it every day, instead of attendin’ to ’er dooties. It’s safe enough, and it’s well took keer on ; and that’s all she’ll know of it until I choose to tell ’er.’

‘And you a-goin’ to leave that poor gal cuttin’ about the streets all night with her ’ead a-fire, while you sits at ‘ome, I s’pose. Come on, Bull ! it makes me sick to look at ’im. We’ve ’ad our quarrels, but you’ve never bin as bad as that, old man. That

poor sick creature 'll die now, as sure as sure ;
and all I 'opes is that her death may be
brought 'ome murder to that man's door !'

But Mrs. Bull's wish was never gratified. Nor did the inhabitants of the little street in Drury Lane ever set eyes on poor shiftless Bonnie again. From the night on which she awoke, half stupefied with the opiate her husband had administered to her, to find that he had robbed her of her child, Kit Masters never was troubled with the sight of his poor wife. A few inquiries were set on foot by the neighbours, but they brought forth no fruit ; and the general opinion amongst the women was that Masters had made away with both Bonnie and her baby, and buried their bodies beneath his floor. Consequently he was very generally shunned, although this behaviour had little effect upon him beside making him let his shop, and go and live with his father and mother at Richmond.

And for a long while faithful Mrs. Bull would watch and wait for the reappearance of the girl she had loved to succour; but Bonnie's violet eyes and sweet, dreamy face were never seen in the little street in Drury Lane again.



CHAPTER IV.

'AND NOW WHERE IS MY BOY?'

WHEN Vivian Chasemore made up his mind so suddenly to accompany his friend Lord Charlesford to Norway, he left an address, to which to forward his letters, with his solicitor. Not that he had any notion that his wife would write to him, or any wish to hear from her. The cruel words which she had spoken relative to having married him for his money had sunk so deep into his heart, that he believed no after-conduct on her part could ever have the power to erase them. Any truce that might take place between them here-

after must be a false and hollow peace, maintained for the benefit of society, and which could bring no comfort to his wounded spirit. So he felt little anxiety to communicate with her, and only longed to put the greatest distance possible between himself and home, and to try and forget all that was going on there.

Lord Charlesford preferred yachting along the coasts of Finland and Norway, and living (when he did go ashore) amongst the peasantry of the country ; and Vivian was quite ready to second his friend's wishes and avoid the paths of civilisation altogether. Consequently, after the first visit paid to the post-town where he had ordered his letters and papers to be sent, he did not see it again, but followed his friend's fortunes wheresoever the bonnie yacht *Thisbe* took them, and lived for several months of summer weather a pleasant sort of gipsy life, half

aboard and half ashore, diversifying his taste of salt water with inland fishing and shooting, and with studying the manners and customs of a much unknown and very interesting people.

Everard Selwyn was perfectly happy, or he would have been so, had he not guessed that Vivian Chasemore was suffering mental tortures even while he laughed and talked as loudly as his fellows, and scorned the notion of fatigue or ennui. Lord Charlesford was a generous, open-hearted young nobleman, with plenty of English pluck and energy, and plenty of money to back it; so that had it not been for the worm of disappointment gnawing secretly at poor Vivian's heart, there could hardly have been found a merrier or more united trio of voyagers in the wide world.

Dr. Morton's croaking prophecies of the dilapidated condition of Vivian's lungs proved

utterly fallacious. They had endured a severe attack of inflammation, and been rather tender for a few weeks afterwards ; but the young man was strong and vigorous, with a good hardy British constitution, and could have stood the assault of many more such attacks with impunity. The unworthy fear of future penury which had induced Regina to carry out her wicked plot for deceiving her husband and defrauding Sir Arthur of his rights, had no cause for springing from Vivian's present state of health, for he became stronger than he had ever been in the bracing air of Norway and from the effects of his sea voyage.

He grew so brown and healthy-looking that Selwyn was almost tempted sometimes to believe that the agonised expressions of despair, which he had been called upon to listen to during his friend's illness, had been the offspring of a fevered imagination, rather

~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~ ~~SECRET~~

young and the strong and robust, with
a good heart, Arthur was easily induced to
have made up his mind to take upon himself
attacks upon Denmark. The aforesaid king
of future security which had induced Queen
to carry out her wicked plot to deprive
~~her~~ husband and perjuring Sir Arthur of
~~his~~ rights, had no cause for springing from
Norway's present state of health, for he had
~~been~~ stronger than he had ever been in the
~~beginning~~ of his sea voyage.

The ~~year~~ is known and the ~~time~~ unknown,
~~the reason~~ the ~~aim~~ of the ~~attack~~ unknown
~~to believe~~ that the ~~attack~~ was ~~not~~ aimed
~~against~~ that he had ~~been~~ sent over to
~~Denmark~~ during his life, and ~~had~~ been
~~deprived~~ of a ~~long~~ and ~~useful~~ career.

than the utterances of conviction. But now and again the knitted brow, closed teeth, and look of pain that would pass over Vivian's countenance, even in their gayest moments, told him that the spirit still suffered, whatever the body was determined to conceal.

Things had been going on in this manner for about six months, when the fast-increasing cold of autumn warned Lord Charlesford that the season for yachting was over, and they had better fix upon some resting-place for the winter months. He had two plans in his head. Should they lay up the *Thisbe* for the winter months in harbour at Norway, and spend their time between Christiana and Stockholm; or run south to Paris and Berlin —or should they return to England at once and make another voyage out with the next spring? Vivian voted for remaining where they were. What was the good of England, he averred, in the winter season, when the

country was a mixture of mud and snow, and London completely empty? If the Norwegian and Swedish capitals did not afford them sufficient amusement, they could easily, as Charlesford had suggested, run over to Paris for awhile and return when they had had enough of it. But whatever they did let them remain out of England. He urged Selwyn to back his choice. But the young actor was his guest and did not choose to take advantage of the fact. He remained neutral, and Vivian had to do a double share of argument on his own account.

Lord Charlesford was quite willing to accede to his request (though he *did* remark that his old mother would be very much cut up if he missed spending Christmas at home), so it was finally arranged that their first halting-place should be Christiana, whereupon the head of the *Thisbe* was turned in that direction, and within a few days they

found themselves there. This was the post town to which the young men had directed their letters and papers to be sent, and there was quite an assortment of news brought them to their hotel the same evening. Vivian tossed over his letters carelessly. They all seemed more or less official: at all events the one handwriting that held any interest for him was not amongst them. Not that he had expected to see it. Regina's pride, he felt convinced, would never permit her to make the *amende honorable* to him, and even were she to do so, what would be the use of it? No contrition for the past nor promises for the future could undo what she had done, which was to reveal her true heart to him. He cast the letters to one side in a heap and took up the *Times* instead, beginning with the last news sent out instead of the first. What made him cast his eye over the list of births he never knew. It was not his habit,

any more than that of other men, to feel any interest in the ‘Ladies’ column,’ but as he folded the sheet his own name in capitals caught his sight and arrested his attention. It is wonderful how soon we can pick out a name familiar to us from amongst dozens of strangers, and his was an uncommon one. At first he wondered who could bear the same cognomen; then, as he read the paragraph more attentively, he perceived to his astonishment that it was really himself, and no one else, who was mentioned therein.

‘On the second of September, at the Hotel Vache, Pays-la-reine, Normandy, the wife of Vivian Chasemore, Esq., of 3, Premier Street, Portland Place, of a son, prematurely.’

‘Good God!’ exclaimed Vivian aloud, as the foregoing announcement made itself apparent to his senses; ‘it must be a hoax.’

‘What’s a hoax, old fellow,’ said Lord Charlesford; ‘nothing wrong, I hope! ’

‘No! I suppose not! but there’s something here about—about my wife!’

‘*Your wife!*’ echoed his friends simultaneously. Knowing Mrs. Vivian Chase more as they thought they did, and that the married couple were not on the most affectionate terms, both their minds had at once leapt to the fear of a scandal.

‘What is it, Vivian? Do speak,’ said Selwyn anxiously. ‘She’s not dead, is she? What are you staring at that column for?’

‘Oh! no! it’s nothing to make a fuss about—but—but—she’s got a baby!’

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ roared Lord Charlesford, ‘is that all? and didn’t you expect it, old boy? What a lark! This comes of married men running off on yachting expeditions and leaving no address behind them. I hope it’s the right sort, eh?’

‘Yes!—a son—at least the paper says so. I say, Selwyn, this seems very queer to me.’

'I daresay it does, old boy, but we've been knocking about so long, you know; there was no means of getting at the news before! Look at your letters, Vivian! There is sure to be something about it there.'

Vivian turned quickly to his pile of correspondence, and examined it until he came to an envelope in a feminine handwriting with a foreign post-mark. He frowned as he caught sight of it. 'Surely I have seen that hand before,' he thought. And the contents confirmed his suspicion.

'Hyères, September 30th.

'MY DEAR VIVIAN,

'I suppose, after the last interview we had together, that you will not be very much pleased to hear from me, but as there is no one else to write to you, and it is important you should learn what has taken place, I am compelled to run the risk of

incurring your displeasure. I happened to be staying at an out-of-the-way little town in Normandy, about three weeks ago, called Pays-la-reine, when the woman of the hotel requested my assistance for a lady who had been taken suddenly ill in the night. Fancy my astonishment when I found it was poor dear Regina! She had wandered over to Pays-la-reine in search of solitude with a lady friend, a Mrs. Brownlow, who had been obliged to leave her the same day, and the disappointment, I suppose, upset her. However, all went well, and she is the mother of a fine little boy. I am sorry to tell you, however, that Regina was so feverish and light-headed afterwards that we were obliged to keep her very quiet, as we could procure no medical assistance. Indeed it was most fortunate I was there (notwithstanding your unkind prohibition, my dear Vivian), or I do not think your poor wife would have got

over it. I nursed her carefully, and as soon as she was able to be moved, we came on to Hyères. I have written to Lady William to come to her daughter (as, *after what you said*, I do not suppose you would wish me to remain with her longer than is necessary), and when she does so I shall resign my charge. Regina begs me to tell you that the little boy has blue eyes and fair hair, and that she has had him baptised by the names of "Vivian Peregrine," as she believed they would have been your choice. As soon as her mother arrives she intends to return to Premier Street for the winter. She sends you her love, and will write as soon as she feels equal to the exertion. Believe me, my dear Vivian, to be your much maligned stepmother,

'CHARLOTTE CHASEMORE.'

Under other circumstances, to hear that

Mrs. General Chasemore was actually living in the same house as his wife, would have driven Vivian nearly wild, but he did not know what to say to this letter. It was impossible to upbraid or even not to thank the woman who had befriended Regina at such a moment, and when he reflected that she might have died without her assistance, he felt almost grateful to her. And yet how ardently he wished that any one but Mrs. General Chasemore had been in the Hotel Vache at that juncture. However, this little annoyance was soon swallowed up in the joy and surprise that followed his perusal of her letter. He had a son at last: an heir to inherit his grandfather's property.

The news had come so unexpectedly upon him that for a while it seemed impossible to realise ; but as soon as he had had time to take it in, his delight knew no bounds. He talked no more of wintering in Stockholm or

even Paris, but averred his intention of returning home at once. He did not wish to spoil his friends' pleasure, he said. Let them continue their route as first planned ; but for his own part they must see that it was absolutely necessary he should return to England. His quarrel with Regina seemed forgotten. If he remembered it with a sudden sigh, the sad recollection was dispersed as quickly as it rose by the thought of little lips ready to welcome him that would never tell him they loved him only for his money. To the young and inexperienced father or mother, it seems impossible that the infant they watch grow up beside them can ever turn round with words of ingratitude and rebellion to sting the heart that has given up all for their sakes. These little lips must love caresses ; these little tongues must speak the truth ; these little eyes can never bear any expression but that of affection and obedience. We

believe our children to be too much our own. We forget that we are but the instruments of bringing into the world and nurturing a set of spirits that may prove to be utterly opposed to our own in strength of will and purpose. Whilst they are infants, and the childish spirits are subservient, we fancy we can mould them to what we wish ; but, alas ! the baby too often outstrips our own in growth, and what we believed to be a docile son or daughter, we find suddenly transformed into a rebellious man or woman.

Of course neither Charlesford nor Selwyn opposed the wishes of their friend. The former, still hankering after the old mother, who would be so disappointed if she didn't see his bonnie face smiling at her across the Christmas table, avowed his intention of returning home in the *Thisbe*, and so the three men set sail together, and after rather a rough passage, reached Southampton in the

month of November. Vivian would not stop for even a night on his way, but, bidding farewell to his friends, proceeded without delay to Premier Street, where, as he rightly judged, he should find Regina. Mrs. Vivian Chasemore, after remaining some weeks at Hyères, had taken the advice of her husband's stepmother, and returned in state to London, where the French *bonne*, who had accompanied them home, was dismissed, and an important-looking English nurse, at forty pounds a year, installed in the office of chief guardian to the young heir. Lady William Nettleship had not joined her daughter as Mrs. General Chasemore had requested her to do. She was ruffled in the first place at Regina having presumed, after all her own prognostications to the contrary, to have a baby; and indignant, in the second, that the event should have occurred with so little ceremony, and under the superintendence of

‘that creature, the general’s widow.’ If the dowager Mrs. Chasemore had nursed Regina so judiciously thitherto, let her continue to do so. Lady William had no desire to share the honour with a woman of whose antecedents the world knew nothing; and as for her grandson, she doubted if he would be any the worse for keeping. Thus she confided to her *camarade*, Mrs. Runnymede, who was quite ready to join in the abuse of a fellow creature whose chief crime in the eyes of society was precisely the same as her own. Lady William had called on Regina in Premier Street as soon as she heard that she was alone, and been introduced to the new addition to the family, magnificent in his robes of cambric and Valenciennes lace; but she had not repeated her visit, and Mrs. Vivian Chasemore was beginning to think it was rather dull work, staying at home and playing at ‘mamma,’ and wished that she

had followed her own idea and gone to Nice or Mentone again for the winter. But the good sense of the advice which had been offered her, showed itself when her lady's-maid rushed into her dressing-room one morning to inform her that the master had just arrived from Southampton, and was coming upstairs. How her heart beat as she heard it! She tried to compose herself and appear calm as she lay on the sofa in her soft clinging robes of white merino, with a pale blue ribbon twined in her golden hair. But Vivian gave her little time for consideration. He ran straight to her dressing-room, and fell on his knees beside her couch. All the bitter past seemed wiped out for ever, as he realised that he had found her again, and she was the mother of his child.

‘My darling!’ he murmured, as he showered kisses upon her face, now flushed with excitement and fear. ‘Can you forgive me? Oh,

Regina ! when I think that I might have lost you during my absence, I cannot tell you how I regret my hasty conduct. But it was all from love of you, my dearest. It was the awful thought that you did not care for me that drove me wild. But it is not true, is it, Regina ? You do love me a little now—if never before—that I am the father of your child ?

‘I do love you !’ she answered, with white, trembling lips.

‘Thank you—thank you a thousand times ! You have made my coming home a happiness indeed. What a surprise it was, Regina, when I saw the announcement in the *Times*. I couldn’t believe my eyes. Why didn’t you give me a hint before I left home ? Do you think I would have gone had I known it ?

‘You were so ill, Vivian—and I was not sure !’

‘I was such a brute, you mean, my darling,

that I had destroyed all confidence between us. I don't deserve to be so happy as I am to day. However, we won't say any more about it, will we? And now, where is my boy? I am all impatience to see the little fellow.'

Regina rang the bell and desired the lady's-maid to tell the nurse to bring down the baby to see Mr. Chasemore.

'To see his papa, you mean!' exclaimed Vivian gaily. 'I hope the poor little chap will never think of me as "Mr. Chasemore." Who is he most like, Regina—you or me?'

'I really don't know,' she stammered. 'He will be very fair, nurse thinks, but you must judge for yourself.'

'And are you very, very fond of him, my darling?'

'Oh, Vivian! of course I am; but he is very small yet, you know—only ten weeks old.'

‘Ten weeks old ! Surely you ought to be looking stronger than you do, Regina ! You seem to me even paler and thinner than you were when we parted.’

‘I have been very ill,’ she said, colouring.

‘Yes, I know you have ; but what does Dr. Morton think of you now ?’

‘I have not seen him since my return.’

‘Not seen him ! Why is that ?’

‘I am quite well. I do not require any medical advice.’

‘But I am not satisfied with your appearance, dearest. I had hoped this little event would make a great improvement in your health, but you are certainly looking very fragile. I shall send for Morton to-morrow, and see what he says about it.’

‘Oh, pray don’t !’ she exclaimed hurriedly. ‘I hate that man, and have not the slightest need of him. I shall get quite strong now you have come home.’

'Bless you for saying that, dear!' he answered just as the nurse entered the room with her charge, and curtsied low to her new master.

'Is this the young gentleman, nurse?'

'Yes, sir! and I hope now you've come back, sir, that his poor mamma won't fret as much as she's been a-doin', for they're neither of them as thriving as I should like to see 'em.'

Vivian took the infant in his arms, and carried it to the light.

'What a queer little mortal!' he remarked as he uncovered its face. 'He is not very fat, is he?'

He was not; for the poor little baby that Kit Masters had delivered over to the care of Miss Selina Farthingale, had not thriven very well on its change of nurses. Doses of gin and opium, hurried journeys by night, and a sudden transfer from its mother's

breast to a feeding bottle, had changed the current of life in the hapless infant's constitution, and given it what its nurse termed 'a check.' Consequently it had progressed but slowly, and at ten weeks old was much paler and older looking than it should have been.

'It is not what you may call a plump baby, sir,' replied the nurse. 'You see, his mamma not being able to nurse him, and his being brought up by hand is a great drawback. But we hope to see him fill out by-and-by and do credit to his bottle.'

Vivian bent down and kissed the little puny face earnestly. Would this joyous new hope which had scarcely had time to settle itself into a certainty, prove a disappointment after all?

'He's not a bit like me, Regina, that's certain,' he said, after a pause. 'His eyes are very blue—quite a violet blue—and his

hair is yellow like yours. And as for his nose, my dear!—I don't know who he's got that from. I'm afraid it's a decided pug.'

'Babies' noses alter so much, don't they, nurse?' said Regina, languidly.

'Oh, yes, ma'am; of course they do. Most babies have the same sort of nose when they're so little. I dare say our young gentleman's there, will turn out just like his papa's by-and-by.'

She received back the bundle of flannel and long clothes as she spoke.

'Come, my beauty! has 'it seen its own papa, then? It'll pick up twice as fast now you've come, sir. I've always said the dear child was a-pining for the sight of you. And he isn't the only one that has pined either,' remarked the nurse, with the familiarity of her class, as she backed out of the room.

'Regina, my darling! is it true? Have you been pining for your husband till even

the servants have remarked it?" exclaimed Vivian as the door closed and he took his wife in his arms.

Her heart was beating so violently, and she was so over-excited that she had no answer to give him, except that which was conveyed by a burst of tears. But it was enough for Vivian. He interpreted it according to his own desire, and resolved that it should wipe off henceforth and for ever the memory of all that had distressed him in the past. There was one matter on which he wished to speak to his wife—the very one which parted them; but he resolved that it should not be yet, but that he would give her time to settle down into the old life again before he broached any subject that was likely to create a difference between them.

"And so you have called him "Vivian Peregrine,"" he said, alluding to the baby.
"I like your choice, darling, because it proves

you were thinking of me ; but I should have preferred him to have my father's name of Edward instead of mine. However, that will do for number two,' he added, laughing.

Regina did not laugh, as most mothers would have done at this very natural joke. She only smiled in a sickly manner, and turned a shade paler.

' How does your mother take it ? Is she not very proud of her grandson ?' continued Vivian.

' I don't think so. She has only been here once since my return, and then she took very little notice of him. She is quite absorbed in that woman, Mrs. Runnymede, and seems to care nothing for her own flesh and blood.'

' Never mind, dear ! We will love the little chap enough for all his family put together, will we not ? Our *own child* ! I can hardly believe it, even now that I have

seen him. I had almost resigned myself to the belief that it would never be! Oh, Regina! my dear, dear wife, you have made me so exquisitely happy. With your love, and that dear little one, I feel as if I should never know what it is to feel miserable in this world again.'



CHAPTER V.

'YOU ARE THE MOST WONDERFUL WOMAN IN
THE WORLD.'

THERE is one person, and by no means an unimportant one in the present history, whose fortunes appear to have been dropped or altogether lost sight of in the general struggle for the shower of gold. I allude to Miss Janet Oppenheim. But she has been by no means forgotten, although the uneventful years she has passed in the service of Miss Netherwood at Clarence Lodge, had afforded no materials as yet necessary to the elimination of this little plot. This fact was due

almost entirely to the absence of Sir Arthur Chasemore from England. Miss Oppenheim had no friends, natural or otherwise. She was parentless, and the few connections remaining to her had made their home in India; she and an orphan grandson being the only relatives remaining to Mrs. Mathers, and the boy had died at sea some time before his grandmother. Consequently Janet Oppenheim had been thrown completely on her own resources when she accepted a temporary home with Mr. Farthingale and his daughter. She had been full of doubts and surmises with regard to the position in which her aunt had left her, but had gained no certain proofs to go upon, when the sudden manner in which she was thrust forth from the lawyer's house, and cast upon the tender mercies of Miss Netherwood, completely confused her mind upon the subject. Was it possible, she thought, that if money

were due to her, Mr. Farthingale would dare defraud her of her rights in so open a manner? She was perfectly aware of the reason she had been sent away, and the knowledge would have been a feather in her cap, had it not been so soon followed by the intelligence of Sir Arthur Chasemore's departure from England. That was a real blow to her. She had just begun to believe she had succeeded in awaking an interest in the baronet's mind, when he went away without even saying good-bye to her. She had intended to consult him on the subject of her own affairs, and see if he could find out anything concerning them; and now she had positively no one to whom she could turn. Miss Farthingale had taken care she should make no friends whilst staying with them (except that one friend, for whose sake she got so abrupt a dismissal), and so she felt that for the present, at all events, there was

nothing to be done but to wait patiently, and make her way as well as she could at Clarence Lodge. She had written a letter to Mr. Farthingale's office, asking humbly for information respecting her late aunt's affairs, and she had received in answer a shuffling statement to the effect that the lawyer was doing his utmost in her behalf, and that as soon as ever he had any satisfactory information to give her, she should hear from him. Miss Janet Oppenheim was wise in her generation. She saw she could do no good by moving in the matter without advice, and so she locked the lawyer's reply carefully away in her desk, and resolved to be patient and bide her time. Meanwhile she had contrived, in her soft, feline way, to wriggle into the confidence of Miss Netherwood, and make herself necessary to that lady's comfort. At the time we meet her again, she had been for three years at

Clarence Lodge, and was the right hand of its mistress. From having commenced as a pupil-teacher, entrusted with only the youngest and most troublesome children in the school, she had risen to be Miss Netherwood's housekeeper and *major domo*—who did all the marketing, superintended the servants, and never entered the schoolroom except it was to carve the joints at the early dinners.

Miss Netherwood, who was almost as much alone in the world as Janet herself, used to declare to her friends that she hardly knew how she had conducted the school before she had the assistance of dear Miss Oppenheim, and she believed she should resign it the very day she left her. Not that Miss Oppenheim was so unworldly wise as to let Miss Netherwood suspect that such a day would ever come to pass. That would have strained the links of the chain that

bound them together. The elder lady never contemplated such a misfortune as losing her young friend, although from her belief in her honesty, sobriety, purity, and all the other cardinal virtues, she might have feared such a complete treasure would be snatched from her arms. But Miss Janet never gave her cause for such a suspicion. Her conduct was propriety itself, and Miss Netherwood did not believe that she ever thought of, far less designed, such an end as matrimony. The good lady had never caught sight of any of those foreign letters addressed to her *protégée* in a bold masculine hand, which commenced to arrive soon after Sir Arthur left home, and for which Janet used to call at the post-office during her daily rounds of duty. The baronet had rushed away from England, disgusted, as he believed, with all he left behind him; but after a while he had felt rather solitary, and thoughts of the

melting looks and soft-purring tones of the girl, who had administered to his consolation by flattering his vanity in Miss Farthingale's drawing-room, crept back into his mind, and raised in it a desire to communicate with her. A note which she had sent to tell him of her abrupt departure, had informed him also of her present address, and there he had sent his first epistle from Algiers, which he had not intended to be the commencement of a correspondence. But Janet had answered it so artfully, that she had drawn him on to send another letter, and yet another, until a system of communication was regularly set up and the post-office fixed upon for an address, lest the number of epistles Miss Oppenheim received should attract attention. It is almost easier to become intimate friends through writing letters than by personal communication. One can say so much more on paper than one can by word of mouth;

besides, time and opportunity and privacy all contribute to favour a confidence which might never have bloomed without their aid. Any way, if the baronet did not fall in love with Janet Oppenheim, by reason of the chatty letters which she continued for the space of two years to send him, he became very friendly and intimate with her, and looked forward with interest to meeting her again. When he returned to England, he found more difficulty in seeing her than he had anticipated, for the rules at Clarence Lodge were very strict: but the uncertainty and secrecy of their interviews made them all the more delightful, and the man who had considered it a nuisance and a trouble to be obliged to attend a dinner-party or a ball, might often be seen pacing up and down some selected spot in St. John's Wood for hours, waiting until the requirements of Miss Netherwood permitted Janet

Oppenheim to leave the house and join him.

Not that he was enamoured of her even yet, or, at least, admitted the fact to himself. He believed he had made up his mind never to marry, and only regarded the little teacher in the light of a dear friend and confidante. And Janet, clever as deep, played her cards into his hand, believing that 'all things come to him who knows how to wait.'

You may be sure that every detail of the Vivian Chasemores' married life, so far as they were known to the public, were discussed at length between these two ; and that Regina's coldness and Vivian's illness and departure to Norway, and the unexpected advent of the heir, were all severally talked about and commented upon.

' You bear it so well,' said Janet, pathetically, alluding to the birth of the baby; as they walked together one evening when she

was supposed to be at church. ‘I cannot think how you can speak so quietly about it. But then, you always were so generous with regard to those people.’

‘Well, it’s not their fault, you see,’ replied Sir Arthur, with a comical air, ‘and only what was to be expected after all.’

‘Not a bit of it! No one had the least idea of such a thing. And they were so very close about it, too. I have heard through a friend of Miss Netherwood, who knows that wretch Selina Farthingale, that even Mrs. Chasemore’s mother had hardly a hint given her of such an event, until it had actually occurred.’

‘Yes! that was queer, wasn’t it. And Vivian himself told me that when he read the birth in the *Times* he thought it must be a hoax.’

‘What an extraordinary idea! One would have thought after all her disappointment,

and considering how much depended on it, that she would have been too proud to make such a mystery of the affair. Where was this important baby born ?

‘ I really don’t know. At some out-of-the-way place in Normandy, I believe. No one seems to be sure. Even Vivian is misty on the subject.’

‘ Stranger still ! Who was with her at the time ?’

‘ I never asked, my dear. She left England very suddenly, and came back in the same way—plus the son and heir. It was altogether very funny, but it’s no business of mine.’

‘ I think it *is* your business, Sir Arthur. Does it not strike you as very unusual, that a young mother about to lay-in of her first child should run away from her own home and friends to be confined in some remote district abroad, without the attendance of a medical man or a nurse.’

‘Oh, I believe old Mrs. Chasemore (the general’s widow, you know) was staying with her at the time, and Vivian was very much annoyed that it should have been so.’

‘Mrs. General Chasemore ! She seems to be a nice character for a reference, if all you have told me concerning her is true.’

‘You are very mysterious this evening, my dear Janet. What are you driving at ?’

‘Never mind. If I told you, you would call me a fool. But I can put two and two together as well as anyone.’

‘I know you can ! That is why I want to know your little game.’

‘Sir Arthur ! has it ever struck you that that child may not belong to Mrs. Vivian Chasemore at all ?’

‘Good heavens ! No ! Whose should it be ?’

‘Oh, you men ! what stupid geese you are !

It is as easy to gull you as possible. Why should it *not* belong to somebody else?

'Why should it? What object would there be in passing off another person's child as their own?'

Janet Oppenheim stopped short and stared the baronet in the face.

'Are you quite blind,' she said, 'or only pretending to be so? Why, she'd do it for the money, of course. I don't say that *he* knows anything about it.'

'For the money? For an heir! I see. But it is not possible, Janet. She could never be so foolish. It would be found out at once.'

'It *will* be found out if it is the case, for I am determined to rest neither night nor day, till I know the truth. For *your* sake!' she added, with a gentle squeeze of the baronet's arm.

Sir Arthur could not recover the shock of the suspicion she had presented to him.

‘Not her child!’ he kept on repeating. ‘Whatever put such an idea into your head, Janet?’

‘Everything! Just put the facts together for your own consideration, and see how suspicious they look. Your cousin left England in May, and the baby was born in September. Why had he no idea of his wife’s condition when he parted with her? Then she leaves her home, still without a word to her mother or any one, and without writing to tell her husband. She remains abroad no one is sure where, with that disreputable old woman, Mrs. Chasemore, and then it is suddenly announced that she has had a baby, and she returns to Premier Street, in pomp, with an infant and nurse in her train. It is all too unnatural not to excite inquiry.’

‘Why should it *not* be her own child?’
repeated Sir Arthur.

‘Why *should* it be?’ retorted Janet Oppenheim. ‘She had every opportunity to palm off the child of some one else, and every inducement to make her do so. Besides——’

‘Besides—what? Don’t keep anything back from me, Janet. I am sure you have some other foundation for thinking as you do beyond the mere suspicious circumstances you have mentioned.’

‘Well, I didn’t mean to tell you just yet, as I said before, but I don’t know why you shouldn’t hear it. I *have* more reason than you think, for talking as I do. What was the name you told me that Mr. Vivian Chasemore adopted whilst on the stage?’

‘Alfred Waverley.’

‘I thought as much. Well, Sir Arthur, it’s very strange, but we have a woman in our house who knew him under that name.’

‘Really! Who is it?’

‘A servant! I’ll tell you how I came across her. I have the engaging of all Miss Netherwood’s servants, and last month we were in want of what we call a schoolroom-maid; that is a person to wait on the young ladies and keep their rooms clean. I went to office after office, but could find no one likely to suit. At last the mistress of one place told me that if I would take a girl who had never been out in service before, she had a very respectable young woman of the name of Belton, who wanted a situation. I saw Belton, and found her to be a pretty girl, but looking very sad and sickly. She was so gentle and quiet, however, that I took a fancy to her; and as I found she could come for very small wages (Miss Netherwood is awfully stingy, you know) I engaged her for the situation, and she entered our house the following day.’

'What has all this got to do with young Chasemore?'

'How impatient you are. Cannot you trust to me to tell you? I was thrown a good deal with this girl in teaching her her duties, and I soon found out there was a mystery about her. She used to cry terribly at night. I have been kept awake for hours listening to her sobbing and to the broken sentences she murmured in her sleep, and before long I taxed her with something she had said, and under a solemn promise of secrecy she told me her history.'

'Anything out of the way?'

'Yes, a very sad one; but I mustn't repeat the particulars. I cannot even tell you what I wish to, unless you will swear never to reveal it until we are certain of its truth.'

'I swear I will not. You may trust me not to expose myself by following a wild goose chase.'

‘It seems this woman, Belton (Belton she says is not her real name) is married and ran away from her husband. Can you guess why?’

‘Never could guess anything in my life, Janet!’

‘Because her child was stolen from her.’

‘But who stole it?’

‘She says her husband did, that it was taken from her side whilst she was asleep, and when she found out her loss she went out of her mind and ran away from him. But the curious part of the story is that the child was a boy and born in the beginning of September, the very same date as the other.’

‘Pooh, pooh, nonsense! my dear girl,’ said the baronet smiling; ‘you are never going to frame a romance on such a slender foundation as that. Do you know how many

children are born on an average every week in the year in London ?'

'Yes, yes ; of course I do, a thousand of each sort. But that's only the beginning of my story. When I questioned Belton, why she suspected her husband of stealing her child from her, she said she believed he had sold it, because he would do anything for money, and that some time before he had betrayed her best friend for fifty pounds, and she had never seen him since. Of course this "best friend" excited my curiosity, and I tried hard to get his name out of the girl, but nothing would make her reveal it. However, a few nights afterwards she was so unusually restless and talkative in her sleep that I entered her room with the view of rousing her, and heard her exclaim "Where's Mr. Waverley, he would find my baby for me ? Oh ! where is Mr. Alfred Waverley ? He would see that justice was done to me."'

‘Nonsense, Janet!’ cried Sir Arthur, with real interest, ‘she never said that.’

‘She did, indeed! When I was next talking to her I asked: “Did you ever know Mr. Alfred Waverley, the actor?” and she got crimson in a moment and denied the fact. I taxed her with what she had said in her sleep, but she stuck to it that she had only seen him once or twice. Then I said, “Do you think Mr. Waverley stole your child?” And she replied, “Oh, no, ma’am! for he’s a married gentleman himself and I daresay has plenty of children of his own.” So I think that if this woman’s baby was stolen for that purpose that she has no cognisance of it.’

‘God bless my soul, Janet! And do you really imagine you can trace any link between your servant’s loss and Regina Chasemore’s baby?’

‘I think this, Sir Arthur. That the man

who received fifty pounds for finding your cousin, would be very likely to earn another fifty if he could by selling his own child. A man of his class would probably imagine he was doing the infant a great benefit by giving it the chance of being reared as a gentleman.'

'But who could have applied to him in the matter? If I remember rightly, old Farthingale could never find out for certain, who did claim that reward.'

'I can't tell you more than I know, and Belton, although she is a very soft, stupid sort of woman, won't let out a word more than she chooses. To all my questions she only returns the answer, "Please don't ask me, miss." I am convinced that nothing would have extracted the name of Alfred Waverley from her, had she been awake, and I am sure she is unusually interested in him from her agitation when I mentioned his

name, but where *can* such a woman have known him ?'

' That might be easily accounted for. Vivian associated with all sorts of low people whilst he pursued that disgraceful profession. But how came this woman's husband, who earned the fifty pounds reward, to be mixed up with this other affair? Surely old Farthingale can never have had a hand in it ?'

' No! no! no! No man would ever meddle with such a dirty plot! Depend upon it, it was got up between those two Chasemore women, whilst the husband was abroad, to cheat him into believing he had got an heir. Now, what do you think of my putting this and that together, Sir Arthur ?'

' I think you are the most wonderful little woman in the world.'

' Don't go too fast. I may be mistaken after all. Still, when *your* interests are at

stake, the matter is at least worth consideration.'

'By Jove! I should think so! I have not forgotten the trick Mrs. Vivian Chase-more played me once before, and would incur any trouble or expense to expose such an atrocious fraud on her part now.'

'Ah! I am afraid you think a great deal too much of her still, Sir Arthur, if you would go such lengths to obtain your revenge.'

'Not in the way you imagine, Janet. I have got over my disappointment long ago, though I can't quite forgive her for it; but I am not likely to let myself be gulled a second time, and particularly when she has perpetrated this deception (if deception it be) simply to ruin my interests.'

'It is the vilest thing I ever heard of,' acquiesced Miss Oppenheim, 'and we must not rest until we have reached the bottom of it.'

‘I am afraid the truth will be very difficult to arrive at, especially as you have bound yourself to secrecy.’

‘Will you leave it to me? You know that I am your friend and that I am working entirely for you. Will you be patient whilst I worm myself further into this woman’s confidence and try to make her betray herself?’

‘I would trust everything I possess in your hands with the greatest confidence,’ replied the baronet growing enthusiastic, as he kissed Miss Oppenheim beneath the cover of the dusk.

Janet drew coyly away from him, not as if she were displeased, but only reticent. She knew that men care little for what they can obtain without cost, and had no intention of selling herself too cheap a bargain.

‘Can you meet me here again, let us say next Sunday, Sir Arthur, and at the same hour? Miss Netherwood is never able to

go out in the evenings and I am free to follow my own inclinations. Perhaps by that time I may have some news for you.'

'I will come without fail, my dear. By Jove! only fancy if it should be true. What an awful sell for poor Vivian, who is as proud over the youngster as a peacock with a tin tail.'

'It will serve him right for marrying such an artful designing woman. He knew she had jilted you and might have guessed there was no good in her.'

'I am afraid he has not made much of a bargain,' replied Sir Arthur. 'It's enough to make a man think twice before he rushes into matrimony.'

'Only that all women are not like her,' interposed Miss Janet softly.

'By George, no! I know one, and not so far off either, who is worth a dozen of her,

twice told. But I suppose you can't guess who that is, eh, Janet ?'

'I have not the least idea, Sir Arthur,' said Miss Oppenheim, as she quietly shook hands with him and slipped away.

She was a good tactician and did not open the Belton siege until she had formed her plan of operations, and found a favourable opportunity for commencing. She had little fear of failure, or at least of failing to find out all that there might be to discover in that servant's past history. For Janet Oppenheim possessed in a high degree that marvellous magnetic or mesmeric power, which enables its owner to draw others to them almost against their own will, and which she had never known to prove impotent except with those who bore her a preconceived aversion. She was very soft and gentle in her manners with the servants : too familiar some people would have called

her, but as she had always been more or less dependent on that class for her comfort in life she had found her condescension stand her in good stead. She would sit with them of an evening and interest herself (or profess to do so) in all their work or home affairs, questioning them as openly as though they were her equals, whilst she appeared to be as confidential with them in return. So that all the menials at Clarence Lodge, thought her 'a very affable young lady, though a bit near with the supper vittles,' and were always wishing her 'as good a 'usband as she deserved, and as many friends as there were days in the year.'

The soft-hearted, friendless Mrs. Belton (whom everyone will have recognised as no other than our poor shiftless Bonnie), was scarcely likely to shut up her lonely soul from the unexpected kindness of such a sociable young lady; and, indeed, in her

childish; timid way she had already begun to lean upon Miss Oppenheim as her counsellor and stay in life. There was only one feeling stronger than gratitude in her breast which kept her lips closed, when Alfred Waverley was mentioned to her. But for the rest, so long as she did not disclose the name that might identify her to her husband, it was a solace in the midst of her misery to be able to talk about it all.



CHAPTER VI.

‘I CAN’T HELP CRYING FOR MY BABY.’

IN order to explain how Bonnie came to be a schoolroom-maid in Miss Netherwood’s service, it will be necessary to go back a little. It will be remembered that the last time Mrs. Bull saw her, she left her in bed with her baby, too sleepy to take her tea or answer questions. Neither of the women knew then how the drowsiness had come upon her, although it was found out afterwards that Kit Masters had administered a soporific to his wife under cover of the medicine. As soon as her neighbour left

her, Bonnie fell into a profound slumber, from which she never roused till late at night, when some instinct warned her that it was time to nurse her infant. She was only half-conscious as she put out her hand to the side of the bed where the baby usually lay, and found an empty space there. Then she woke thoroughly, and, searching the bed all over without success, leapt from it with a loud cry, as the idea darted into her mind that whilst she slept her child had fallen from her arms and been killed. The noise brought Kit Masters upstairs.

‘What are ye yellin’ for?’ he demanded roughly.

‘My baby!’ exclaimed the terrified girl. ‘Where is my baby? I cannot find it anywhere. Oh, Kit, have you got it downstairs? Did you take it along of you?’

‘*Along of me!*’ he growled. ‘What d’ye suppose I should take a squalling brat into

the shop for? to wake up the whole street. I've had more 'n enough of 'is yells, I can tell ye. I aren't 'ad a proper night's rest since the little hanimal was born, and I won't stand it no longer, and that's the hend of the matter.'

'But *where* is it?' repeated Bonnie wildly. 'Give it to me, Kit. I will keep it quiet. It shall never worry you again. I'll sit up all night with it rather. Only it is so young; it shouldn't have been took out of the bed.'

She was hurrying on a pair of slippers and a dark tweed cloak that had served her as a dressing-gown as she spoke, though her trembling hands would hardly permit her to do the fastenings. Only she was so anxious to go into the other room and fetch back her baby. 'He would be so cold,' she thought, 'lying there alone.'

'Now, ye jist lie down agin,' said Kit

sharply. ‘I’m not going to ’ave you catch your death o’ cold for that blessed babby. Lie down, I say, and cover the clothes over you.’

‘Yes, Kit, I will—only give me back my baby. He must be very hungry, it is such a long time since I nursed him. You shall see how quiet we will be, lying here together.’

‘Well, then, I can’t give ’im you, and so there. You’d better hear the truth at once.’

The mother’s eyes almost started from her head with fear.

‘You *can’t* give him to me! Oh, Kit, tell me, quick—what is the matter? Is he dead?’

‘Not as I knows on.’

‘Where is he, then?’

‘I can’t tell you that, neither; but ’e’s well provided for, and you must be content to know it.’

“Well provided for!” repeated Bonnie in a dazed voice.

‘Yes, much better than you could do for ‘im, and with a person as knows all about babbies and their ways. I told you a’ready that I couldn’t stand no more of his screechin’, nor I can’t spare you to be a-hangin’ arter ‘im day and night. And so I’ve put ‘im hout to nuss, where ‘e’ll be safe took care on, and you can git about all the sooner and tend to your dooties.’

But Bonnie did not quite comprehend him.

‘Have you took him away?’ she said in a fearful whisper. ‘Won’t they bring him back again? Shan’t I sleep along ‘im to-night?’

Masters broke out into a hoarse laugh.

‘No, you won’t, my dear, so the sooner you makes hup yer mind to it the better. You’ll see ‘im again, maybe, if he grows hup, but I’ll be whipt if I’ll ‘ave ‘im a cuttin’

about 'ere and givin' trouble for the next ten years. I've shipped him hoff to the country, where 'e'll be a deal better looked arter than here; so hall you've got to do his to get to bed agin, and make the best of it—for the job was done four hours ago and more, and there's no undoin' it.'

'My baby! Oh, my baby!' shrieked Bonnie, in that voice of despair that reached Mrs. Bull's ears, as she flew past her husband and ran downstairs.

At first he did not follow her. He believed she had merely gone to search the house for the infant, and chuckled in his brutal manner to himself as he thought how her trouble would be wasted. But he was startled when he heard the shop-door slam. He jumped up and looked from the window then, fearful of the neighbours' tongues if Bonnie appealed to them in her excited condition, and made her wrongs public.

But all he saw was a dark figure flying down the street as though it scarcely touched the ground, and, with an oath at her and all women, he stumbled downstairs, with the intent to follow and bring her back. He undid the door, and stared up and down the street, but Bonnie had totally disappeared ; and Mr. and Mrs. Bull were ready to confront and pester him with the inquiries already related, until he was completely out of temper with them and himself, and retired to rest determined to do nothing at all. ‘Such an infernal fuss,’ as he expressed it, ‘for a wretched squaller of four days old, whom he’d as soon have drowned as a kitten !’

Meanwhile, Bonnie flew like the wind in the direction of Waterloo Bridge. She hardly knew where she was going, or what she wanted ; but her head and her heart were on fire with the one awful thought that Kit Masters had stolen her baby from her, and

lay in her bed with closed eyes and silent lips until they began to suspect her of being sicker than she really was. When the time arrived for her discharge, the doctor was quite uneasy to think what would become of the poor shiftless child thrown on the tender mercies of the world : and the matron, who had been attracted by Bonnie's mournful eyes and pertinacious silence, offered to give her house-room for a little while until she could get a situation of some sort and work for her living. From this circumstance rose the idea of her going out as a servant. The matron finding the girl almost as reticent when alone with her as she had been in the hospital, advised her to put her name down on the books of a registry office, to which end she appropriated some of the money given her by the sympathetic doctor as a little help upon the path of life. Thus it came to pass that Bonnie fell in with Miss Janet Oppenheim,

and was engaged as schoolroom-maid at Clarence Lodge. Her duties lay entirely upstairs, and as they included a good deal of needle work, which she executed in Janet's room, it naturally followed that that young lady and herself often spent some of the evening hours together. On the day when Miss Oppenheim had decided to try and gain her further confidence, Bonnie was sitting as usual, stitching away at some house linen. She looked very staid and pretty in her print dress and white cap, with her fair soft hair parted neatly on her forehead ; but her face had grown very thin, and there were lines about the childish quivering mouth that had never been there before. The trouble poor Bonnie had passed through had cleared and strengthened her brain, and made her more womanly than she had ever been before. She would never be clever (live as long as she might), but the 'daft' look of which her

old grandmother had complained, seemed to have been lost in the plaintively quiet expression which now pervaded her features. That she could hold her own was proved by the pertinacity with which she refused to give Janet any information of importance respecting herself, for with the exception of talking of her little baby, she was almost obstinate. But touching that, she felt she must have relief. Her mother's heart would have broken with longing despair if she could not sometimes have indulged it with weeping for her lost little one.

Janet entered the room with some needle-work in her own hands. It was evident that she intended to spend some time in the company of her servant. She sat down beside Bonnie as naturally as though they had been sisters, and smiled kindly in the blue eyes that were raised to her own.

'Well, Belton, how are you getting on with

the pillow-cases? Rather hard sewing, I am afraid, but like most disagreeable things, they must be done.'

Bonnie, who had never been famous as a seamstress, regarded her pricked fingers with a deprecatory look.

'Yes, miss, the stuff be hard—I mean, it *is* hard—though I've rubbed it well too.'

Miss Oppenheim had been correcting Bonnie's grammar amongst other things, until the girl had begun to be ashamed of speaking in the old way.

'Let me soap that seam for you, Belton. It will be twice as easy then. And your thimble is too large. You can never work comfortably with it. I will lend you mine. I have another in my basket.'

'Thank you, miss! You are so very kind to me,' said Bonnie, gratefully.

It was by such little acts of attention, politically bestowed, that Janet Oppenheim

owed her success in getting her own way with both the upper and lower classes.

'Oh, it is nothing, Belton! It is my object to get the work done, you know. And I am hemming these frills to trim them with. They are for Miss Netherwood's pillows. She is very particular about the appearance of her bed and has always been used to have frilled pillow-cases.'

'I don't think Miss Netherwood would know how to get on without you, miss.'

'Don't you? But she may have to do it all the same, Belton.'

'You're not going away from us?' cried Bonnie in real distress as she grasped Janet's black silk arm.

'No; not at present at all events. Still I do not suppose I shall live here always. I might marry some day.'

'Oh, don't you marry, miss?' exclaimed the girl earnestly. 'It's a bad job that marriage,

for any poor woman. See how I suffered from it. It a'most killed me.'

'Poor thing! yes, I know it did; but then you had a very bad husband, Belton. All men are not so bad as he was. Perhaps you married in too great a hurry and had not seen sufficient of him.'

'No! I didn't,' was the mournful answer. 'For months and months I wouldn't have him nor even speak to him, but grandmother said he was such a likely fellow, and could keep me so well that t'would be a sin to say "no" to him.'

'Your grandmother was mistaken evidently, for he seems to have been the worst husband I ever heard of.'

'Yes, miss, he was. The very worst.'

'You must try and not think about it, Belton. You will make yourself quite ill if you cry so much.'

'I can't help crying for my poor baby,

that she should never see him more. A policeman met her rushing at the top of her speed down the Strand, and hailed her to know her business. But she never heeded him, nor arrested her footsteps for a moment; and as she passed beneath a lamp and he caught sight of her uncovered head and wild appearance, he crossed the road and followed in her wake. On—on—she ran, the policeman keeping well behind her, for he could not have overtaken her without using still greater speed, until she came in sight of the still waters sleeping in the moon-light, and the cool breeze from across the river stirred the light garment she wore and made her shiver. The official in pursuit expected to see the poor creature halt near the parapets of that ‘Bridge of Sighs,’ which has proved the entrance to the Gates of Death for so many, and fully intended as soon as the girl did so, to arrest and lead her away. But he was

scarcely prepared to see her bound, without pause or hesitation, upon the stone coping of the bridge and fling herself headlong into the river. Without a cry or apparently the slightest fear Bonnie sprung forward to meet her doom, as if she were rushing into the embraces of a mother. But help was close at hand, and she had scarcely sunk before the policeman had summoned it, and she was dragged from the water and hauled into a boat. Short as the time of her immersion was, however, it was long enough to render her insensible. The unnaturally heated condition of both mind and body was sufficient to make the shock almost fatal, and for weeks afterwards Bonnie lay in a hospital completely unconscious of all that had befallen her. As she recovered her strength and her senses the people about her became most anxious to ascertain her name and address, but they could get nothing out of her. She

lay in her bed with closed eyes and silent lips until they began to suspect her of being sillier than she really was. When the time arrived for her discharge, the doctor was quite uneasy to think what would become of the poor shiftless child thrown on the tender mercies of the world ; and the matron, who had been attracted by Bonnie's mournful eyes and pertinacious silence, offered to give her house-room for a little while until she could get a situation of some sort and work for her living. From this circumstance rose the idea of her going out as a servant. The matron finding the girl almost as reticent when alone with her as she had been in the hospital, advised her to put her name down on the books of a registry office, to which end she appropriated some of the money given her by the sympathetic doctor as a little help upon the path of life. Thus it came to pass that Bonnie fell in with Miss Janet Oppenheim,

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'Your grandmother was mistaken evidently, for he seems to have been the worst husband I ever heard of.'

'Yes, miss, he was. The very worst.'

'You must try and not think about it, Belton. You will make yourself quite ill if you cry so much.'

'I can't help crying for my poor baby,

miss. He was such a dear little fellow and the very image of me. I feel as if my heart would break whenever I remember him.'

'If it really relieves your mind to speak of him, Belton, of course I would not forbid your doing so. You can talk as you will to me, you know. I shall never repeat what you say.'

'I know you won't, miss, and it's been a great comfort to me to open my heart to you as I have. The nights are the worst part of it, when I can't speak to you. I wake up sometimes and fancy I've got his little head aside of me, and, when I remember as I shall never see him again, I feel as if I should go mad.'

'Are you *sure* you will never see him again?' demanded Janet deliberately, as she looked Bonnie in the face.

'Why, how can I, miss, when that brute stole him out of my very bed, and sent him

away to the country? I know nothing about the precious child—who's got him, nor where he went. We can't never meet until the Judgment Day.'

'But because your husband did not choose to tell you where the baby was gone, is no reason that we should not find out, Belton. Of course, it will take time and trouble, and we might be disappointed, after all; but if his loss makes you so miserable, surely it is worth the attempt.'

The pillow-case dropped from Bonnie's hand, as she turned startled eyes of surprise and inquiry upon Janet Oppenheim.

'Miss, miss! do you mean as you think I could ever find my baby again?'

'Why not? If the child is alive he must be somewhere, and you have a right to know where that is. Your husband cannot have sent him away without the knowledge of some other people—his parents, perhaps;

and I feel sure that proper inquiries would elicit intelligence concerning him.'

Bonnie sank on her knees and, hiding her face in Miss Oppenheim's dress, burst into a flood of excited tears.

'Oh, miss!' she sobbed. 'Oh, miss! if you could find my little boy for me again, I would serve you without wages to the very last day of my life.'

'Come, Belton, don't be foolish. I will help you in every way I can, if you will be quite open with me. Dry your eyes, and let us sit down and talk the matter over quietly. Miss Netherwood has gone out for the afternoon, and will not be back until late. We have a good time to ourselves, and you can speak as freely as you choose.'

'What can I tell you more, miss?' replied Bonnie, as she settled herself to her work again.

'Why, I don't even know your husband's

name, nor where he lives. How could I set anybody to find out where the baby is, unless he is told the name and address of the person who sent him away, or, as you say, stole him.'

'I'm sure he stole him,' retorted Bonnie. 'What should he want to pay for my child being nursed out for? He wasn't over and above free with his money, miss; and the poor baby would have cost him nothing at home.'

'That is one point of importance,' said Janet, as she noted the fact in her pocket-book. 'But then, on the other hand, what should he steal the boy for?'

'To sell him, maybe,' replied Bonnie bitterly; 'he was such a beautiful baby—anyone might have been glad to buy him. He had blue eyes, almost as big as mine, and yellow hair on his head as soft as gosling's-down, and such pretty little toes and fingers.'

The poor young mother, in her excess of vanity, had hit the right nail on the head, although she little believed it.

'Come, Belton,' said Janet laughing, 'stick to reason. Whoever heard of a baby being sold? Who would buy it? People have generally more children of their own than they know what to do with.'

'Yes, miss, so I've heard; still my husband was just the man to part with his own flesh and blood for money. He loved money as his soul, so I don't believe he would have ever troubled about the child, unless it was to bring him something.'

'You must tell me your real name, you know, Belton, if I'm to do you any good.'

'Will it send me back to Kit, miss? because if it do I'll throw myself into the river again first.'

'I *promise* you it shall not. What object could I have in betraying you to him. I

should gain nothing and lose a good servant. I want to find your baby for you, Belton, and if I can, you shall both be sent away together wherever you may choose, so that Kit—if that's the man's name, may never hear of you again. I have more money than you think for, and I promise you this upon my sacred word of honour.'

Bonnie could not disbelieve so solemn an assurance, and the idea of regaining her child broke down all her resolutions of preserving secrecy.

'Oh, miss! I must trust you, but remember I'll kill myself sooner than go back to him. His name is Kit Masters, miss. Christopher Masters that is, and he's a green-grocer as lives at number nine in Little Tobago Street at the back of Drury Lane. Mrs. Bull, the butcher's wife as lives round the corner, was a good friend to me and grandmother, and knows that all I've told

you is the gospel truth. But you'll never betray me, miss, will you ?'

'Never, my poor girl ! You need have no fear of it. And so your name is Mary Masters. However, I must go on calling you Belton, so that is of little consequence.'

'Miss Netherwood won't never know of it, miss, nor the other servants,' continued poor Bonnie, dropping a few quiet tears. She was half afraid now that she had let out her cherished secret, whether she had not been rash, but the thought of her baby surmounted every other.

'Certainly not ! But now I want you, Belton, to tell me all you can remember about your child. The day he was born and the day he was taken away from you, what clothes he had got on at the time and as exact a description of his appearance as you can give me.'

'He was bornd on the twenty-seventh of

last August, miss, at three in the afternoon. Mrs. Bull was along of me at the time as has had seven herself, and she said he was the finest child she'd ever——'

'Yes, yes, Belton, I understand all that. Well, he was born on the twenty-seventh. What day was he stolen from you ?'

'On the thirty-first, miss. He was getting on so beautiful and filling out as fast as could be, and we had been sleeping together all day, and when I woke up in the night, my poor baby was gone and I've never seen him since.'

'He was only four days old then, when you lost him.'

'Just so, miss! And I went quite wild when I found it out and throwd myself in the river.'

'Stop a minute! Did your husband ever hint to you that you would have to part with the child or that he meant to put it out to nurse ?'

‘Never, miss! He used to swear at its screaming when Mrs. Bull washed it, but I thought nothing of that. Kit was allays swearing.’

‘What did he say when you awoke and missed the baby?’

‘He said he’d shipped him off to the country (oh, I mind it so well! I can remember every word!), and that I should never see him again till he was grow’d up, may be, but he was well provided for, and I must be content with that.’

‘Why didn’t you ask where he had sent him?’

‘Oh! I did, miss. I asked again and again; but he said first that he didn’t know, and then that the dear baby was with some one who could take much better care of him than I could (as if any one could love him like his mother!) and that he wouldn’t stand his screeching and screaming. And then,

when I cried he said I must make the best of it, for the job was done and couldn't be undone again.'

'Are you sure he said that?'

'The very words, miss. Every one's burned in upon my brain. They told me at the hospital that I kept repeating them over and over again all the while I lay ill.'

'Belton! the more I think of this business, the more I feel inclined to agree with you that your husband sold the baby to some one.'

'Oh, they'll never give him up again, then!' cried the poor mother, with clasped hands.

'If we trace them, they must. It's not lawful to sell a child in this country. But it will take a long time to find out, and you must try and be patient. Let me hear your description of the baby over again.'

'He was a big boy, miss, and weighed a good twelve pounds when he was born.

And he had blue eyes and soft light hair (there ! just the moral of mine), and such a curious little mark on his left ear.'

'A mark,' exclaimed Janet, quickly, 'that is of the utmost importance, Belton.'

'Why, miss?' she asked, simply.

'Because, you goose! don't you know that all little babies are alike, and if they have no distinguishing mark it is almost impossible to tell one from the other. Tell me all you can about the baby's ear.'

'It was so funny, miss; I never seed such a thing before, but Mrs. Bull said they called it a "pig's ear" down her country side, and that the baby would be a rare greedy little fellow.'

'Mrs. Bull saw it too, then?'

'Oh yes, miss! the very day they took him from me. She came in to give me my tea, but I was too sleepy to take it. But I showed her the baby's ear. It rose on the

top with a white lump like a currant, that made it look square, and for all the world like a little pig's.'

'Should you know it again if you saw it, Belton ?'

'*Know it again, miss?*' echoed Bonnie, with overflowing eyes. 'Oh ! I should know my dear baby anywherees. He wasn't one to be mistook.'

'To be mistaken ?' corrected Janet, quickly. 'Now there is another question I want to ask you, Belton. You mentioned to me once that your husband had betrayed a friend of yours for fifty pounds. Was not that friend Mr. Alfred Waverley ?'

The blood rushed in a torrent over poor Bonnie's brow and bosom, dyeing them crimson ; and for a few moments she could do no more than bend her head over her work in silence.

'These little matters are more difficult to

keep secret than you think for, Belton. Mr. Waverley is a well-known gentleman, and everybody has heard of his being discovered by means of a fifty-pound reward.'

'Do you know him, miss?' demanded Bonnie, in a low voice.

'No, I do not, but I am acquainted with several persons who do.'

'Oh! if I could only speak to him for a minute,' said Bonnie, still blushing from the effort of mentioning his name. 'I think he would help me! He was always so good and kind to me, Mr. Waverley was. I am sure he would help to find my poor baby.'

Janet saw her way now to bribing the girl into further confidence.

'You *shall* see him, if you wish it,' she answered stoutly. 'I will answer for that, and between us all, Belton, it will be hard if we cannot do something to help you out of this scrape.'

‘Oh, miss! how good you are!’

‘But where did you become acquainted with Mr. Waverley?’

The question succeeded so naturally that Bonnie answered it without consideration.

‘He lodged at grandmother’s, miss, for many years.’

‘Ah! when he was on the stage? And he was found there, of course?’

‘Yes, miss.’

‘And Masters was the person to give up his address.’

‘Yes, miss.’

‘Then you must have seen the lawyer, Mr. Farthingale?’

‘A red-headed, foxy little gentleman, miss? Yes; he came one day to see grandmother. That was before I was married, a goodish bit.’

‘Ah! you didn’t marry till after Mr.

Waverley had left you? Well, Belton, I ain afraid you made a sorry bargain. It is almost enough to frighten one from following your example.'

'Yes, miss. But if you can find my baby for me, and—and—Mr. Waverley could be brought to hear of it, I know he'd help me; and I think I should feel almost happy again.'

'I will do my very best,' replied Janet rising; 'but remember, Belton, you must be patient, and follow my advice in all things. I know you can hold your tongue, so I do not caution you against chattering; but I warn you that you may have to wait some weeks, or even months, before you hear the intelligence you are longing for, and it can only be brought about by your obeying implicitly everything that I tell you.'

'Oh, I'll be as good as good, miss—indeed I will!' replied the girl earnestly, as she bent

her moistened eyes upon her work again ; and Janet Oppenheim left the room, having drawn every available piece of information out of her poor simple little heart.

When she related the conversation to Sir Arthur, as they walked together in a sequestered part of St. John's Wood, on the following Sunday evening, it really seemed to form a very circumstantial chain of evidence against Mrs. Vivian Chasemore.

' You see there is but one link missing to render the story complete, Sir Arthur, and that is the identification of the infant in Premier Street with the infant that was born in Drury Lane.'

' True ; but that seems the most difficult part of the business to me. Who is to identify a child lost sight of at four days' old ?'

' I agree with you. The mother's recognition would not be sufficient, even though the

boy appears to have been marked, for two children might be marked alike. Therefore it will be quite necessary to get one of the confederates to betray herself as well.'

'Which would do so ?'

'Mrs. General Chasemore ! You know she has a world-wide reputation for drinking, and a woman who drinks has neither brain nor discretion. She is sure to let out the secret in her cups.'

'That would be useless, unless there were more than one witness by to bear the confession and expose it.'

'I know that therefore I intend to be one of those witnesses and to provide the other. Then, when Mrs. General Chasemore denies her own words and Mrs. Vivian denies her friend, I will produce Beeton to recognise the which.'

'How will you prove Beeton to them ?'

'I am young or tell you all my plans.

Miss Netherwood's sister comes to stay with her next week, and she has just offered me a month's holiday, which I have accepted. That will give me the time and opportunity to put them into execution and to succeed, if success is obtainable.'

'Janet! you are the most wonderful little manœuvrer I ever met with.'

'I am doing it all for your sake, Sir Arthur.'

'Why address me so formally? Does not an intimacy of three years' standing warrant a little more familiarity? I always call you "Janet."'

'I know you do, but there should be more reticence in a woman's tongue than in that of a man. We are only friends.'

'Are you quite sure of that, Janet? Has it never struck you that our relations are assuming a somewhat warmer character than that of friendship?'

'I don't know what you mean—Arthur,' said pussy-cat, with downcast eyes.

'Listen to me, then, and I will tell you.'



CHAPTER VII.

'NO LIKENESS IN HIM TO EITHER OF THEM.'

MRS. VIVIAN CHASEMORE, notwithstanding her house in Premier Street, her carriage and horses, her security from future poverty, and her son and heir, was miserable! Her husband's return, to which she had looked forward with more pleasurable anticipation than she had ever felt in her life before, had only filled her breast with apprehension and alarm. He had become so suddenly and absurdly fond of *the child*! Regina had hoped and imagined that the supposed birth would make Vivian prouder and fonder of

herself, and smooth over the unhappy differences which had lately marred their married life and caused her more secret grief than her pride would permit her to acknowledge. But she had not expected that whilst he did not much more than keep on friendly terms with herself, he would lavish all the love for which, now that it appeared to be slipping from her grasp, she had commenced to pine, upon his supposititious son.

It turned her sick with envy to see the caresses Vivian gave the little one, or to hear him talking fondly to it when they were alone together and there was no one to laugh at his paternal weakness. Her jealousy urged her to be almost rough with the baby, and the idea that she did not care for it, made her husband still warmer in his expressions of affection.

‘ You don’t love our little boy, Regina,’ he

said reproachfully one day, when he and she and the infant were alone in her dressing-room, and he had held the little fellow up to her to receive an indifferent caress.

‘Oh ! yes, I do ! but I never cared for young babies, Vivian. They are all so much alike.’

‘Well, I used to think the same before this little chap came, but every day seems to make a difference in him now. Look ! how he’s staring at that prismatic glass. I’m sure he sees the changing colours in it ! Have you ever noticed what a strangely-shaped ear he has, Regina ?’

‘No ! which ear ?’

‘The left ! Look at it ! It is nearly square.’

‘It will be very ugly when he grows up !’

‘What a shame ! He’s going to be the bonniest boy in England. Tell naughty

mamma to kiss you, baby, and beg your pardon for calling anything about you "ugly."

He put the child into Regina's arms as he spoke, but she held it so awkwardly that it puckered up its mouth and began to cry. It was not the poor girl's fault. The beautiful instinct of maternity that transforms every mother, however young, into a nurse, had never come to her assistance. The baby cried, and she did not know how to soothe it.

'Do ring for the nurse, Vivian. He gets more fractious every day. I wish he would grow a little faster. Children are so much nicer when they can run about.'

'And then you will want to put him into a jacket and knickerbockers and hurry him off to school,' said Vivian warmly. 'I wish you showed a little more interest in him, Regina. It seems so unnatural that you should not do so.'

'I am sure I do everything I can for him,' she answered quickly. (The term 'unnatural' alarmed her.) 'He has the best nursery and the best nurse in London. Mrs. Fleming is quite devoted to the child and thinks nothing too good for him.'

'And no more she ought,' said Vivian as he walked to the window and drummed upon the panes to attract the infant's notice. Amongst men he would have been as shy as most young fathers of acknowledging the affection he had conceived for this little child; but he felt his heart growing closer to it, day by day, and spent hours in dreaming of a future when he and his son should be friends and companions and bear the burden of life for one another.

'Oh! Vivian! you are making such a dreadful noise,' pleaded Regina fretfully.

He sighed and walking away from the window gave the infant a coloured scent-

bottle to play with, which it immediately thrust into its mouth.

‘I have wanted to speak to you, Regina, ever since I came home, about something, but I have not had courage to introduce the subject for two reasons. First, because you have been ill and I cannot bear to annoy you, and secondly, because it is such an unpleasant one.’

‘If it is unpleasant, Vivian, for Heaven’s sake keep it to yourself.’

‘No! that is impossible, and the sooner I speak the sooner it will be over. Mrs. General Chasemore was here yesterday afternoon, was she not?’

‘Yes! How can I refuse myself to her after all she has done for me?’

‘I acknowledge it will be difficult to break off the acquaintance again, and I am very sorry for it. But I cannot have your good name suffer because this woman happened

to be in the hotel when you were taken ill.'

'If she hadn't been there, I might have died,' murmured Regina.

'So she wrote to me, and no words can express the gratitude I felt to think you had help at hand. Still ought I on that account to permit you to endure the society for life of a person whom I know to be a most disreputable connection? If Mrs. Chasemore had any delicacy, she would not come here, after what passed between us, but she has none. I must leave it to you, therefore, to break off the intimacy as quickly as possible.'

'I am sure *I* don't know how to do it!'

'How did you manage to cut Mrs. Henry Lascelles and Lady Duncan when you heard of their antecedents?' demanded Vivian sternly.

‘Neither of them was my husband’s step-mother.’

‘Bother the stepmothership! We owe Mrs. Chasemore no extra duty on that account, rather less! She inveigled my poor father into marrying her when she knew that had he possessed an inkling of her true character he would have fled her as a pestilence. Regina! I have not told you half of that woman’s profligacy. I did not like to pollute the ears of my wife with such stories. But her drinking propensities are perhaps the least of her crimes. She is a known vicious character, and I will not permit her to darken my doors!’

‘Oh! I hope you are not going to begin that subject all over again. One would think *I* had brought Mrs. Chasemore into your family. She was not *my* father’s wife.’

‘My dear Regina, I am not blaming you for the present inconvenience; though it is

an old sore of mine, as you well know. It has been the cause of great unhappiness—to me at least—for when I parted with you last May, I did not care if I ever came home again or not. So, added to all the past, she is now doubly odious to me, when I think how nearly she wrecked our lives. But all I ask of you is to do your best in the future. Deny yourself to her when she calls—make what excuses you can—but let her see that you are determined not to carry on the acquaintanceship. I would have given anything that she should not have been *the* one elected by Fate to be present at your confinement !

‘So would I,’ acquiesced Regina, and sincerely, for she was beginning to fear that Mrs. General Chasemore might not be a very safe person to quarrel with.

‘It was truly unfortunate! I have never understood how the old woman happened to

be at the same inn with you, nor why the landlady could not have attended to you herself,' said Vivian. 'And what on earth were you doing at such a time wandering about alone in an out-of-the-way place like Pays la Reine ?'

'I had Selina Farthingale with me,' stammered Regina, who felt she sank deeper in the mire every time the dreaded subject was broached.

'And you seem to have struck up such a friendship for that old maid too ! I thought you hated her before our marriage.'

'Oh ! no ! it was not quite so bad as that ! I don't care much for her, even now, but she was very kind to me whilst you were away. Don't be hard on me, Vivian. I was very lonely and—and—miserable, and whatever I did wrong, I did for your sake,' said Regina, relapsing into tears. So unusual a mood on her part, softened him at once.

‘Don’t cry, my angel ! I am not angry. I only want to caution and advise you. There ! baby ! go and cuddle in your mother’s arms and tell her we both love her dearly.’

But Regina pushed the infant away.

‘I only want *you*,’ she whispered, as she laid her wet face against that of Vivian.

‘Well, you *have* me, dear, fast enough, I’m sure,’ he answered, laughing ; ‘and there’s no one to dispute your rights, unless it be this young monkey here ; and if you find him a nuisance, why it’s all your own fault, you know, and you must grin and bear it’

How well she knew it to be her own fault ! How often she had wished even by this time, that she could have been content to try and win back her husband’s affection by herself, and leave the future with God.

‘Shall I send him away ? Does he annoy

you ?' asked Vivian, as she lay back on the sofa with closed eyes and knitted brow.

' I have one of my bad headaches,' she answered, and he rung the bell for the nurse.

The door opened, and a stranger stood on the threshold.

' Mrs. Fleming is occupied for the moment, ma'am, and cannot come downstairs. Shall I take the baby up to her ?'

' Yes, perhaps you had better do so.'

The woman received the infant from Vivian's arms and carried it carefully away.

' Who is that, Regina ? I never saw her before.'

' She only came here yesterday evening. The upper housemaid had announced to me most unexpectedly in the morning that she must return home at once as her mother had broken her back, or some rubbish of that sort, but that her cousin would take her place whilst she was away. So, as servants

are scarce, and I don't want to lose Ellen, I let the cousin come, and that is she. Her name is Jane. She seems a decent enough body.'

'Very much so! I like her appearance immensely. She looks so modest and has such a soft voice. I think Ellen had better stay away altogether.'

'I don't know that Jane would remain if she did. Nurse told me this morning that she is engaged to be married. She seems to take a great interest in the baby. Perhaps that is the reason.'

'I hope she will be very careful of him. These girls are so ignorant sometimes.'

'Fleming will take care he comes to no harm.'

'So much the better. Well, dear, I'll leave you now, and perhaps you will go to sleep and get rid of your headache. Don't fret about what I said to you, Regina. The

task will be easier than you imagine, and after what she did for you and our baby I don't want to have to attack the old woman myself on the subject.'

'Oh, no! pray don't!' cried Regina, nervously. 'I will do all that is necessary, Vivian—indeed I will—and avoid her as much as possible for the future.'

But when her husband had left her to get rid of her fictitious headache, Regina knew that she had promised more than she could possibly perform. It was all very well to tell her to drop Mrs. General Chasemore, but that lady had already intimated pretty strongly that she had no intention of being dropped. Four months only had passed by since she had done Regina, what she called 'the greatest service possible on earth,' and she had already drawn more than once on her patience and time and purse, in return for the risk she had run in her behalf. The

money was but a drop in the ocean. Vivian kept his wife so liberally supplied that ten, twenty, or even thirty pounds at a time was not seriously missed from her private funds ; but when she found that Mrs. Chasemore intruded upon her, not in the dusk of the evening only or when she had been invited, as heretofore, but at any moment of the day, heedless whether she encountered the master of the house or not, Regina became seriously alarmed, for what might transpire if those two met and the lady was thrown off her guard, she was afraid to think. Mrs. Chasemore had once frightened her beyond measure by affirming that she had a rod in pickle for Master Vivian if he dared to insult her in the future. Her wretched victim had not been bold enough to ask her the meaning of her words, but she guessed it too well, and had been too timid since even to suggest that her visitor should choose more reasonable

hours for calling at the house. Once she had appeared there when considerably the worse for liquor, and Regina, blushing with shame that her servants should be witness to her own degradation in owning such a connection, had yet been obliged to entertain her for some hours whilst she strove by every means in her power to prevent her loud tones and unguarded words from making their way beyond the walls of her private sitting-room.

‘Lor, my dear ! and how’s the child getting on?’ she had exclaimed on that occasion. ‘I met it in the park the other day, and thought I should have burst out laughing in the nurse’s face when she informed me it was growing more like its dear papa every day. Poor Vivian ! What a costermonger’s cut he must have about him.’

‘Oh hush! pray,’ entreated Regina with blanched cheeks; ‘the whole house will hear

you, Mrs. Chasemore, if you do not take more care.'

'Well, and what if they do? It needs more than a couple of words to settle a business of that kind. But what have you been doing to the brat? He looks very puny to me.'

'I don't know why he should. Mrs. Fleming takes the greatest care of him, I believe. But she says he is like a child whose mother has fretted. She looked very suspiciously at me as she spoke.'

'Ha! ha! ha! She has heard of Master Vivian's *escapade*, I suppose, in the servants' hall, and fancied it worried you and had an effect upon the child. She little thinks how philosophically you took it.'

'But it did worry me!' replied Regina, with dignity. 'I don't think you give me credit for maintaining even friendly relations with my husband, Mrs. Chasemore.'

'Oh don't try to humbug me!' exclaim the older woman rudely; 'I can see terms you are on together perfectly. And if you would have done what you *have* done if there had been the least affection between you! You like the money, my dear, and would have sold your soul to secure it. That's the long and the short of the matter.'

'I often wish I hadn't done it,' sighed Regina. 'I had better have sold my soul than established such a constant dread of myself. There is not a day but what I fear the whole thing may come out.'

'Pooh! nonsense! how can it? unless you are fool enough to turn queen's evidence against yourself. You know Selina's situation and so am I. By the way, my dear, I am going to ask you to do me a little favor. My wretched quarterly pittance is not paid till the end of the month, and I have a horrid impudent fellow dunning me for a lit-

draper's bill. It's only twelve pounds. Can you lend me the money till Saturday week ?'

' I think I can,' replied Regina, as she rose and opened her *escriatoire* to get the notes. But the secret drawer was empty. ' I forgot,' she added, suddenly, ' I left my purse in the library yesterday. I will go and fetch it.'

But as she was about to leave the room, she heard Vivian's voice in the hall below.

' Oh ! Mrs. Chasemore,' she exclaimed, turning back with alarm. ' My husband has come home. You must wait for the money till to-morrow.'

' No such thing, my dear ! it's quite impossible,' replied the widow with an unmoved countenance. ' I shall be thrown on my beam ends if I go without it. The man is to call again this evening, and I promised he should be paid.'

' But Vivian is sure to be in the library ! He will see me looking for my purse, and

ask what I want it for. Perhaps he will follow me upstairs too.'

'I can't help it if he does! I don't intend to take any more impertinence from him, I can tell you.'

'But oh! Mrs. Chasemore, do please consider; if Vivian were to find you here, there might be another row, and it *is* so unpleasant before the servants.'

'I will soon stop his tongue, my dear! I have it in my power to make a greater row than he if I feel so inclined.'

'But if you would go now—you don't mind my speaking openly do you? I will send you the notes by this evening's post without fail.'

'They will be of no use to me then. I must have them by nine o'clock tonight.'

'I will fetch them then,' cried Regina in desperation; 'only pray lock the door of the

room inside, and let no one enter till I return.'

She had to tell all sorts of fibs to get away from her husband, who wanted to detain her in the library whilst he related the day's adventures ; but she managed to shake him off at last and return to the boudoir. The excitement and flurry of the affair, added to the difficulty of getting the half-intoxicated woman out of the house without being seen, afterwards made Regina quite ill, but it did not seem to have the least effect upon Mrs. General Chasemore.

' Lor', my dear,' she said contemptuously, ' you're far too nervous to undertake anything like an intrigue. You should have been one of the lovey-dovey-cooey sort of wives, who consider it incumbent to tell their husbands every time they cut their nails. I should never be surprised to hear any day that you had blabbed the whole story to him

yourself. You're a very different sort of woman from what I expected. However, as you seem anxious to do the domestic, I'll relieve you of my presence. Good-bye! my love to Master Vivian Peregrine Chasemore and compliments to Monsieur son père—ha! ha! ha!

And, under the guardianship of a servant, the wretched woman had stumbled down-stairs, whilst Regina hung over the banisters, watching with breathless fear lest Vivian should be disturbed by the noise, and leave the library to learn the reason of it.

But though no such *contretemps* occurred, the experience of that day and others like it, had convinced Regina that no frailer tenure for a secret could be found than the faith to be placed in Mrs. General Chasemore's feelings of prudence or honour. And she was not the only person either to be conciliated or feared. Selina Farthingale also came in

for a share of the good things, and, although she was not in a position to require loans of money, she did not fail to make Regina feel her indebtedness to her in other ways.

By the time Vivian reached home, she had established an intimacy in the house which she never afterwards abandoned. Day after day (to the great disgust of Lady William Nettleship, who considered that the circumstance defrauded her of her just rights) Miss Farthingale appeared in the carriage by the side of Mrs. Vivian Chasemore, or accompanied her to the theatres and other places of amusement. Vivian considered the intimacy a nuisance, and wished Regina would discontinue it. He had never liked Selina, and began to think he should never be alone with his wife again, so persistently did the old maid, as he called her, appear as a standing dish at their dinner-table. Once or twice he joked Regina on the subject, and asked

her if her friend had better not bring her night-cap and take up her abode altogether in Premier Street, and was surprised to find that the joke fell flat or was received with a look of confusion or dismay.

Meanwhile Selina kept her footing manfully, and had come to be regarded as Mrs. Vivian Chasemore's most intimate friend. And poor Vivian wondered at it all, and held his peace. Regina's heart stood still as she considered by what means she should ever get rid of these two harpies, each of whom she firmly believed would have no hesitation in betraying her if no further benefit were to be derived from keeping her secret.

A wild thought flashed through her brain whether she could bribe the doctor to say she could not live in England, and make Vivian take her away to America, or Australia, or some far off place, and commence

a new life there with him, and—and—with baby. But the next moment she had almost smiled at her own simplicity. To what part of the world could she go, where letters could not follow and annoy her, and to what end had she connived at deceiving her husband, if she were compelled to resign all the delights of society and civilisation in order to carry out her plot with success. No ; however difficult and thorny the path she had marked out for herself, she must tread it now without flinching. There was no going back, and there was no refusing to pay the debt she had incurred. She should never get rid of Mrs. General Chasemore nor Selina Fartingale. Her best hope must be that they would continue to cling to and be faithful to her. But how to deceive Vivian and yet retain the affection on which she was beginning to set so high a value ?

Regina, as she thought of the difficulties

in her way, wished that she had died before she had consented to make such a dupe of him. If the death of the child could have compassed her ends, I believe she could have found it in her heart to murder the poor innocent in order to be free to win back her husband's love with a clear conscience. But she knew that the baby's death would not release her from the bondage in which she had enthralled herself. Two other women would still know the hateful secret and hold it *in terrorem* over her. So there seemed to be no hope nor help anywhere for Regina as she lay upon her couch and mourned over the consequences of her deceit.

Meanwhile, the new servant Jane had carried the infant in his beautiful lace robes and white satin ribbons safely to the nursery, where Mrs. Fleming was in the act of getting up some valuable lace.

'Here's the young gentleman,' she said, as

she entered the room. ‘ It was his papa who gave him to me. What a handsome man he is, nurse ! I am afraid baby will never be so good-looking.’

‘ Well, no ! he don’t favour his papa, do he ? I think he’ll take more after the mistress, being so fair.’

‘ I can’t see any likeness in him to either of them, though I dare say he’ll be a pretty enough little fellow when he grows up. But I never saw a child with so strange an ear !’

‘ Now what’s to find fault with in the blessed innocent’s ear !’ exclaimed Fleming, quick, like all nurses, to take offence at any slur cast upon her charge.

‘ This little lump ! it sticks out so.’

‘ Bless you, that’s nothing ! I confess, when I first saw it, I thought it might want the knife, but I showed it to the doctor, and he said ’twould be hardly noticeable by-and-

by. His old grandma made such a fuss over it when it caught her eye, declaring it had never come from her side of the family and all sich rubbish, that one would have thought the dear child had been born with an ear like a pumpkin.'

'His grandmamma? What, Mrs. General Chasemore?'

'La bless you, no! That old sot's no grandma of his. I meant Lady William Nettleship.'

'But is not Mrs. Chasemore Mr. Chasemore's mother?'

'Not a bit of it, only his stepma, and the most disgraceful old creature as I ever saw. Why, would you believe it, Jane? that Thomas tells me that the last time she called here, she was so drunk she could hardly get up the stairs.'

'How horrible! I wonder the mistress likes to receive her.'

'So do I, and particular as the master's always at her about it. Thomas says he's heard him hammering away at her by the hour together, and all because she will say she's at home to that old figure. I wonder how she can find any pleasure in her company.'

'Ellen told me that the mistress was all alone with Mrs. Chasemore when the baby was born.'

'Ah! so I've heard, and it's a mercy she didn't kill them both then, for I suppose she was drunk as usual.'

'Does she often come here?'

'Two and three times a week, and then you can hear her voice a hollerin' loud enough to rouse the street. And, by the way, look here, Jane! If ever she should come of an afternoon when the mistress is out, and the lady's-maid shouldn't be in the way, and you have to show her up to the

boudoir, don't you give her any liquor—mind that !

' But what am I to say if she asks for it ?'

' Oh ! tell the first lie you can think of. Say the butler's out, or the keys are lost, or anything. It's sherry she's so sweet upon ! She'll never drink anything else, and Thomas says the way she pegs into it is something awful.'

' Do you mean to say she *really* gets tipsy ?'

' Bless you, yes ; and when she is so, she doesn't care what she says. I've seen the mistress in a perfect fright and a terror sometimes how to get her out of the house again. And she talks so loud, you can hear her up here.'

' What does she talk about ?'

' All manner of things, but chiefly abuse of the master. There's no love lost between they two, you may take your oath of it. And

the other old lady's nearly as bad. I should think the mistress must be driven nearly wild between them.'

'She seems as if she was half worried to death with something or other. I shouldn't think she was a happy woman, to look at her.'

'Between you and I, my dear, she's *not*, and that's the Bible truth. I know she gets very little sleep of nights, and you scarcely ever see her smile.'

'Doesn't she care for the baby?'

'No more than if she'd picked it up out of the streets. It makes my blood boil sometimes to see how careless she is of it. It isn't, so to speak, a fine child, but I've seen many worse, and if a mother's not to care for a poor dear baby, who is?'

'Some women have no natural feelings,' observed Jane.

'Ah! she hasn't, though one would think

she'd be proud to have a little son, after waiting three years for it, too ; but, there, some people never know when they're well off, in my opinion !'

Jane laid the baby gently down upon its bed, and left the room to look after her own work. But the next time she met the lady's-maid upon the stairs, she informed her that she didn't care for going out herself, and that if ever Mrs. Rose wished to take an afternoon walk in the absence of her mistress, she would be very happy to undertake her duties for her.

'Oh, thanks ! you're very kind, I'm sure,' replied Mrs. Rose, who particularly liked walking with an amiable valet who lived not many doors away ; 'and I shall be only too glad to get a sniff of fresh air in the park sometimes when my lady's out dining.'

Consequently the new housemaid soon found herself ensconced in her mistress's

dressing-room during the afternoons, ready to attend to any visitors who might wish to wait in the boudoir for Mrs. Vivian Chasemore's return. But before she had had the opportunity to receive any one, she had taken care to provide herself, in case of need, with two bottles of the best sherry.



CHAPTER VIII.

‘SHE LEAVES ENGLAND THE DAY AFTER
TO-MORROW.’

VIVIAN CHASEMORE had spent Christmas in London that year, in hopes that, as time went on, his wife might become stronger and more fit for travelling. But as the spring set in bleak and stormy, and her weak state of health continued, he decided to transport the whole family to Nice with as little delay as possible. He came to this resolution rather suddenly, and more on account of the infant than his mother. For the extreme cold did not seem to agree with the son and heir, and during the last few days he had

become weaker and more languid than Mrs. Fleming liked to see him. She had even carried him to Regina's dressing-room with a request that Dr. Morton might be sent for to examine into his condition. Now, for obvious reasons, Regina had avoided this gentleman's presence as much as possible since her return to England. She was afraid of the scrutiny of his professional eye, not knowing how much or how little he might be able to guess of her secret by merely looking at her. She fancied that on the few occasions he had visited the nursery, he had glanced suspiciously at herself, and she dreaded his putting questions which she might be unable to answer. So that when Mrs. Fleming first suggested sending for the doctor, she tried to avoid the necessity for it, and said they had better wait a day or two and see if the child really required medical attendance or not.

'Wait a day or two!' echoed the nurse indignantly; 'if you knew anything about babies, ma'am, you would not talk like that. Why! an hour's too long to wait sometimes, with an infant of this age. Their lives are like the snuff of a candle—out before you can say Jack Robinson. The child's looking very weak, in my opinion, and shrivelled with this cold, and if you won't send for the doctor, ma'am, I must ask the master to do so.'

'Why, you don't mean to say he's really ill!' exclaimed Regina, with a look of consternation that gained her more of Mrs. Fleming's favour than she had ever enjoyed before.

'For she did really seem as if she cared for the poor little thing at that moment,' the nurse observed afterwards to her confidante Jane; 'and it drew my heart out to her.'

But the expression had only been caused

by the sudden fear that the baby might die, and that if he did die, all her anxiety and suspense and sin would have been in vain.

'There is nothing *really* the matter with him, is there?' she repeated, as she gazed into the nurse's face.

'Well, ma'am, I don't want to frighten you! I won't go so far as to say the dear baby's downright ill, but he's ailing, and he don't get on as I should like to see him, and if I told you otherwise I shouldn't be doing my duty by the child.'

'What is the matter?' demanded Vivian, who entered the room at that moment.

'Oh, Vivian, Vivian,' cried Regina, over-powered by the combination of feelings that assailed her, 'nurse thinks that the baby is ill, and we ought to send for Dr. Morton!'

The way in which she laid her weary head upon his shoulder and wept as she said the words, appeared to be just what a young and

anxious mother would do under the circumstances.

Her husband kissed her to reassure her fears, but his face became almost as white as her own.

'Is this true?' he asked, turning to the nurse.

'Well, sir, the mistress is frightening herself beyond what is needful, but there's no doubt that the dear child does not thrive, and I should like to have Dr. Morton's opinion on him.'

Vivian rang the bell furiously.

'Send Thomas at once to fetch Dr. Morton. Say that the baby is ill, and we must see him immediately,' was his order, as the servant appeared to answer it. Then he went up to the infant and kissed its cheek softly. 'Dear little fellow,' he murmured. 'He does look thin and pinched. What do you think is the reason of it, Fleming?'

'Well, sir, the dear child has never really thriven, so to speak. You see his mamma didn't nurse him herself, and I think he ought to have had a wet-nurse from the beginning. And this cold is terribly against him, too. He'll look very different when the warm weather comes.'

'We will take him to Nice, if the doctor recommends it,' said Vivian, gravely. Then he turned to the sofa, across which his wife had thrown herself sobbing. 'Regina, dearest, try to control your feelings. I am so afraid you will suffer for it. The dear baby's not really ill—only a little ailing, and Morton will soon set him right again.'

'Oh no, he won't. He's going to die. I am sure of it, and it is all my fault, and you will never love me again,' she ejaculated, almost beneath her breath.

'Don't talk of such a thing!' said Vivian, shuddering.

He had scarcely realised, till that moment, what the loss of this little infant would be to him.

‘Now, ma’am, pray don’t take on so, or you’ll kill yourself as well as the child! And what will be the good of that?’ interposed the nurse philosophically. But Regina would listen to neither of them, as she rocked herself backward and forward and thought what would become of her if the baby were to die, and all her trouble would be wasted.

The doctor’s entrance put a stop to further discussion. He examined the pinched features of the infant, felt its feeble little pulse, put a few inquiries to the nurse as to its digestion, and pronounced its condition to be wholly due to its being reared by hand.

‘You must get a good wet-nurse for it at once,’ he said cheerfully. ‘I will send you one in from the hospital this afternoon, and the little fellow will be all right in a week.

Come, Mrs. Chasemore, you mustn't worry yourself about nothing; there is no need of these tears. The baby only wants a little alteration of diet to be as strong as ever.'

'I was thinking of taking them both to Nice until the warm weather,' said Vivian.

'The best thing you can do, my dear sir, provided you get a wet-nurse first. Give the child the breast and a warmer temperature, and we shall see him come back a perfect cherub! Good morning! I will send you a woman this afternoon,' and with many bows the fashionable doctor took his departure.

'It's just as well to try it,' thought Mrs. Fleming, as she carefully covered up her little charge and carried him upstairs; 'but I don't like the look of the child's face, and I shan't be easy till it's gone again.'

As soon as they were alone, Vivian approached the couch and folded his wife in his

arms. Her apparent solicitude for the baby's health had caused him to believe himself mistaken in her feelings.

' You feel more comforted now, darling, don't you ? ' he said. ' Morton promises we shall have the wet-nurse this afternoon, and I will make every preparation for our starting to Nice next week. Shall you be ready to go by then ? '

' Oh yes ! ' she answered languidly.

' It will do you good as well as the little one, for I have not liked your looks lately, Regina. Why are you so melancholy, my dear, and disinclined for the pursuits in which you used to take so much pleasure ? You don't seem to care for dressing or dining out or anything now.'

' I feel so weak,' she said in a low voice.

' You must have refused at least a dozen invitations during the last month, and seem to care to see no one but that horrid Selina

Farthingale ! It makes me very unhappy, Regina.'

She was silent.

' Is there nothing I can do, my wife, to bring back the smiles of which I used to be so proud ? If anything could make me regret our baby's birth it would be to see how it has altered you. You are not the same girl I married. I do not know you in these tearful languid moods.'

' I am so unhappy, Vivian !'

' But why, dear ?'

' You will never love me again !' she said, as she hid her face from him in the sofa-cushion.

' Oh, Regina ! I have never ceased to love you ! But you never seemed to care about my love. You affected to despise any demonstration of affection until I checked my own wishes in order to make myself more agreeable to you. And then, during that

last miserable interview we had before I went to Norway, you told me so bitter a truth it nearly broke my heart. How could you expect me, after that, to guess that you were unhappy for lack of love ?'

' It was not the truth,' she whispered ; ' at least it is not now. I wish sometimes that you had never had any money. It has been the curse of my life. I hate the very name of it.'

' No, no, dear ! don't go so far as that,' said Vivian, cheerily. ' Money is a good enough thing in its way, but if you have lived to love me the better of the two, why, let us thank God for it, that's all.'

But though he took her in his arms again and kissed her warmly, Regina's heart was not satisfied. There was something forced, both in his manner and her own. She had blighted the fresh, warm love he had given her with the coarse asseveration she had

made—it would never be the same again ; and between them lay the shadow of the awful lie which she had told him—the trick she had played upon his best and purest affections.

And until this obstacle were removed by a complete confession, she knew his love would never spring up for her again in its former luxuriance, for there can be no real love without the most entire confidence.

The wet-nurse arrived as Doctor Morton had promised, and the infant having submissively agreed to the change of plans, the fears of the household subsided, and no one except Mrs. Fleming anticipated any further difficulty. But she, with feminine consistency, was rather inclined to be offended at her system of diet being exchanged for any other, although she had been the first to propose it.

‘ It’s just as well the poor innocent has

taken to her, as it's the doctor's wishes,' she grumbled to Jane, confidentially; 'but as to every one crying out that he's got a colour in his cheeks already, and is quite a different child, well, I can't see it, that's all! And he was wheezing terribly in his sleep last night, too! I couldn't get a wink myself for hours, and feel quite wore out with it to-day.

'This running off to Nice is a very sudden affair, and quite upsets everybody's plans,' observed Jane.

'So it does! The mistress meant to stay at home this afternoon, but the master's hurried her off after something to do with the journey. She was up here just before she started, and left particular word that if anybody calls, Mrs. Rose is to say as she'll not be home till the evening. I suppose she expects that old faggot Mrs. Chasemore to turn up, and wants to get rid of her before the master and she comes back. But Mrs. Rose

has gone out on particular business of her own.'

'Oh, I will take her duties for her and see after Mrs. Chasemore,' cried Jane with alacrity.

'Well, if you ain't as good-natured a girl as ever I met with,' said Mrs. Fleming admiringly, as the housemaid left the room. Whether Jane employed the interval in praying that the General's widow might make her appearance that afternoon, it is impossible to say; but if she did so her prayers were answered, for about four o'clock an audible colloquy with Thomas in the hall was followed by his calling her name and informing her that Mrs. General Chasemore desired to wait in the mistress's boudoir until her return. It was not the first time by many that the old lady had called in Premier Street since Jane had been located there; but on each other occasion Regina had been at home and enter-

tained her visitor herself. Now, however, the opportunity she longed for had arrived, and she determined to make the most of it.

As she stood at the head of the stairs waiting to receive the lady, she watched her first lay hold of the handle of the dining-room, as though she were about to enter there.

'That's the dining-room, if you please, ma'am,' observed Thomas, smiling.

'Oh yes, of course! I wish to wait for Mrs. Vivian in her boudoir.'

Whereupon she grasped the handle of the drawing-room door, which came next in order.

'That's the drawing-room, if you please, ma'am,' interposed the footman, with a broad grin.

'Of course! I know that! I'm going to the boudoir,' responded Mrs. General Chase-more, and immediately fell to wrestling with

the door of the library, which completed the suite of rooms on the ground-floor.

‘That’s the library, if you please, ma’am,’ again suggested Thomas, as he burst out laughing behind her back.

‘I know that as well as you, man!’ replied the lady testily, as she stumbled against the lower stair. ‘I have told you already that I am going up to Mrs. Vivian’s boudoir.’

‘Here, Jane; come down and help the lady up to the boudoir,’ said the servant, insolently—(servants will be insolent when their superiors degrade themselves)—and the housemaid, delighted rather than disgusted at the mystified condition in which the general’s widow appeared to be, ran smiling down the steps to offer her arm. But Mrs. Chasemore refused her support with the supreme haughtiness of a person who knows that she is not walking quite straight.

‘I need no assistance of yours, young

woman!' she said in a tone of offence; 'I'm neither infirm nor ill. Go on in front and open the door of the boudoir for me.'

The housemaid did as she was desired, stirring up the fire to a cheerful blaze, and wheeling an arm-chair in front of it for the accommodation of the visitor.

'Mrs. Vivian Chasemore will be *so* disappointed, if she comes home and finds you have gone, madam!' she observed, as she removed the widow's fur cape and muff, and placed two or three illustrated papers on the table beside her. 'She was talking of your coming here all the morning. But Mr. Chasemore particularly wished her to choose some purchases this afternoon, and quite dragged her out with him against her will, or I am sure she would have been here to welcome you.'

'Who are you, young woman?' demanded Mrs. Chasemore. 'I have never seen you

here before, and you speak much above your station in life.'

'Well, madam,' said Jane, blushing, 'I have received the benefit of a good education, and see no harm in profiting by it. But I am only here for a short time, in the place of my cousin, Ellen Withers, who has gone home for a holiday. Will you allow me to get you some tea, madam, or some coffee?'

'You seem to be a very superior sort of young woman, and I should think Mrs. Vivian would be sorry to lose you again. I don't care about tea or coffee, my dear, they don't agree with me; but if you could get me a glass of sherry, I shall be obliged to you. I have walked all the way from my house, and feel quite knocked up.'

'You shall have it in a minute, madam,' cried the obliging young woman, as she flew from the room.

In another moment she returned, bearing

a couple of glasses and a black bottle of sherry.

'I am so sorry to be obliged to bring it to you in this rough manner, madam!' she said, with a winning smile; 'but the fact is, the butler is out, and he is so suspicious of us poor servants, that he won't leave the keys of the pantry behind him for a moment. But this is the very best sherry, madam; you need not be in the least afraid of it, for it was bought expressly for me when I was very ill, and the doctor chose it himself.'

'Upon my word, young woman, you are very obliging!' said Mrs. General Chase-more, as Jane poured out a good bumper of the wine and handed it respectfully to her. 'It is, as you say, most excellent sherry; but I mustn't deprive you further of your little private store.'

'Oh, pray don't think of that, madam! It is of no use to me, I assure you—indeed, the

doctor has forbidden my taking it any longer ; and I shall be too much honoured if you will do me the favour of drinking it.'

Mrs. General Chasemore seemed to think this was the most sensible sort of servant she had ever encountered ; and as she lay back in her chair, and smacked her lips over the sherry, she considered whether it might not be possible to induce her to accept service with herself as soon as her term of duty with Mrs. Vivian was ended.

'Don't leave the room,' she said graciously, as Jane made a feint of retiring. 'I should like you to stay and talk to me a little, if you have time. How soon do you expect to leave Mrs. Vivian's service ?'

'I don't know, I'm sure, madam. It depends, I suppose, on my cousin's movements. She has gone to nurse her mother, who has met with an accident, and I must remain here till her return. But perhaps, now that there

is a wet-nurse, they will be able to do without me.'

'A wet-nurse! What! has the baby been ill?'

'Oh yes, madam; quite poorly. They were obliged to have the doctor to him, and the whole house was in an uproar. I felt it myself terribly; for so much of my work has laid in Mrs. Fleming's rooms that I have taken quite a fancy to the dear little fellow.'

'But he's better, I suppose?'

'Yes, madam—much better, though Mrs. Fleming won't believe it. But his papa is very anxious about him still. I never saw a gentleman so wrapped up in a baby as he is in Master Vivian!'

The comical look which appeared in the corner of the old lady's eye at this assertion did not escape the notice of the housemaid, who perceived to her satisfaction that the wine was gaining an ascendancy over Mrs.

Chasemore's brain, and would doubtless loosen her tongue before long.

'Is he now? But not more so than the baby's mamma, I suppose?' she observed slyly.

'Well, if I must speak, madam, I should say he is by a great deal. My mistress doesn't take much notice of the baby, to my mind. It seems to worry her more than otherwise. And that's strange; for, of the two, I'm sure it is more like her than like its papa.'

'Of the two, yes! But not much like either, eh?'

'No, madam. If I thought you would forgive me, I should say that the baby didn't seem to me to have the same high-class look as his papa and mamma and yourself, madam. I have lived so much amongst the nobility, that I have learned to study appearances almost like a book.'

'You're a very clever girl!' said Mrs.

Chasemore; ‘but you can’t judge babies by older people—babies alter every day.’

‘Yes, madam. But I wish his mamma took more notice of the dear little fellow. She’s a long time getting about, too. She says her illness is all due to her confinement, but I think that must be her fancy,’ remarked Jane, with a searching glance at the widow.

‘Yes, yes, of course! She is fantastical, like all the women of the present day,’ replied Mrs. Chasemore, as she helped herself to a fourth glass of sherry. As it trickled down her throat she winked at the housemaid. ‘It’s all fancy, my dear—all fancy! I was present during her trouble, and she made nothing of it—positively nothing!’

‘So I’ve heard,’ said Jane, demurely.

‘What have you heard?’ asked the other quickly.

‘Only, madam, that the mistress doesn’t look, to the doctor and nurse, as if she’d gone

through a bad time—in fact, they say they would never have known she had been confined at all, if she hadn't said so herself.'

'Ah!' ejaculated the widow, wagging her head oracularly and rolling her eyes. 'And what do *you* say, Jane?'

'I say the same, madam,' was the quiet answer.

'But you won't betray her?' cried the creature, in her drunken folly. 'You won't go and tell anybody what you've heard, will you, Jane? because it would ruin poor Mrs. Vivian, you know, and can do you no good! You are a respectable, well-educated young woman, Jane, and I'm sure you must know how to keep a secret, and would never go and tell people that the child isn't her own, just to make mischief, and be turned out of a good place, when you could get a great deal more for holding your tongue about it.'

'Let me give you a little more sherry, madam!' said the housemaid, as she poured out another glassful.

'It has shaken my nerves to hear you say you have found out all about it,' remarked Mrs. General Chasemore, as she raised the glass with trembling hands to her lips; 'because people will tell you, perhaps, that I had a hand in it, and I had not indeed! I happened to be staying in the place at the time, and Mrs. Vivian asked me to nurse her; and though I thought all the circumstances very strange, it was not my part to chatter about it, and so I held my peace; but it was very unkind of Regina to mix me up with the affair at all!'

'It is of no use denying it any longer, madam,' said Jane, who had now heard all that was necessary for her purpose; 'for, to tell you the truth, the whole town knows it, and whose child it is that was provided for

the purpose of keeping the baronet out of his money in case of Mr. Vivian Chasemore's death.'

Mrs. General Chasemore was by this time so intoxicated, that it never occurred to her muddled brain to inquire how the housemaid had gained the information of her employers' private affairs.

'Good Lord!' she moaned, in a puzzled and besotted manner. 'How am I to get clear of it all?'

'What I should recommend you to do, madam, is to make a clean breast of it at once to Mr. Vivian Chasemore. He knows the whole story, but he does not suspect that you had any hand in deceiving him. If you go straight to him and say you have discovered the plot and think it your duty to inform him of it, you can explain your own part in it as you see best.'

'But tell me,' cried the widow, clutching at

the housemaid's arm, 'won't Regina have a word to say in the matter, and betray that I and Selina Farthingale made the purchase of the child between us ?'

'If she does, you can but contradict her statement. You will be first in the field, and anything she may say in her own defence will be put down as invention. Let me entreat you, madam, for your own sake to lose no time in telling your stepson everything.'

'But Regina will be so angry with me,' whined the widow, 'and so will Selina. They are both in the scrape, and I promised so faithfully not to tell.'

'Then Mrs. Vivian will give her own version of the story first, and lay all the blame of it upon you. I assure you, madam, that her husband is only waiting till he has collected sufficient evidence to expose the whole affair. And it is rather a serious business, remember ! I am not sure whether

you could not be transported for life if they can prove you to have had any hand in purchasing the child in order to commit a felony on Sir Arthur.'

'Oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall I do?' repeated Mrs. Chasemore, weeping hysterically. 'I dare say I could make Vivian believe me, but then I should have to break off entirely with Regina. And I have not been half paid yet for all the trouble I took and the terrible risk I ran. I am sure if I have had fifty pounds from her, it's as much as ever I've received, and the Christmas bills come so heavy, and I've furnished my house new on the expectations she held out to me; and now to give it all up—it seems very hard.'

'Oh! if that is what causes your hesitation, madam, I can very soon satisfy you on that score. Mrs. Vivian Chasemore has no intention of providing you with any more money.'

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CHAPTER IX.

VIVIAN, I DID IT FOR YOUR SAKE !

"England!" exclaimed the widow
"and without a word to me! It is
visible!"

"Indeed, madam, it is quite possible! If
you like to step into the dressing-room, I can
show you the travelling trunks ready packed.
We are going first to Nice for an indefinite
time, and then to Italy and perhaps
Spain. My own idea is that the mistress
of the house intends to return to England

"But why?" gasped Mrs. General Chase-

more, ‘when they have a beautiful house like this and every comfort. Why?’

‘Because, in my humble opinion, madam, she wishes to shake you off and have nothing more to say to you. She has incurred a heavy debt of gratitude to you, and she wants to shirk payment. She is trying to get the master to take her out of the country until the story shall have blown over, or where, if it should ever come out, she may be able to make good her own share in it without any interference on your part.’

‘But this is infamous!’ cried the widow excitedly, ‘she has used me as a ladder to climb to her ambition, and now that she has attained it, she would kick me over.’

‘Just so, madam! your simile is a beautiful one, and states the case exactly. I have overheard her say as much when she was alone. The master has begun to inquire how she has spent her money lately, and to

say he must look into her accounts ; we servants hear a great deal of what goes on in a house, you know, madam, and I heard her answer that she had given a lot away in charity the last few months, but that she was determined to do so no more.'

'In charity, indeed ! the impudent minx ! To dare to apply that term to her own husband's mother. And when *my* husband was a general too ! and the one before that a colonel ! I declare to you, Jane, that I have never received half my due for all the trouble and anxiety I took on her behalf, carrying that horrid child all the way to Normandy in my arms, and every one wanting to see what I had got in my bundle. I thought I should have thrown it overboard before we were half-way there.'

'I can quite believe it, madam ; but as you were doubtless careful enough not to let Kit Masters guess your identity, there will be no

difficulty in clearing yourself from blame in the eyes of Mr. Vivian.'

'Who is Kit Masters?' demanded the widow.

'He is the father of the baby, madam, and he has told everybody of the whole transaction. I believe that he will be here to-morrow to speak to the master himself about it.'

'Oh, Lord! why did I ever have anything to do with it?' exclaimed Mrs. Chasemore, whilst her watery eyes seemed starting from her head with alarm.

'It will be quite easy to clear yourself from blame, madam, if you will only take my advice and tell Mr. Chasemore that you came here to-day for the express purpose of informing him that when you nursed his wife, you were unaware that the infant was not her own, and that now that you have discovered you were made a party to a fraud, you

cannot rest till you undeceive him also. Hark! there is the carriage! I will go and fetch him up here, and you can tell your tale at once. Don't tremble so! Take another glass of sherry. It will steady your nerves.'

'But if Vivian asks how I found it out, what am I to say?' demanded the wretched woman, as she tossed down another bumper.

'Say that *I* told you!' replied the house-maid firmly. 'I know the mother of the child, and can make my own story good, and yours into the bargain.'

She ran downstairs as she concluded, anxious only to bring the belligerents together before Mrs. General Chasemore's Dutch courage should evaporate.

She found the party in the drawing-room, Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Chasemore, and Miss Selina Farthingale, who had caught sight of them in Oxford Street and insisted upon

entering the carriage, and they were just inquiring of the footman if any one had called during their absence.

Jane went up straight to her master's side.

'Yes, sir, some one has called and is waiting to see you on most particular business in my mistress's boudoir.'

'To see *me*, Jane?' repeated Vivian with surprise. 'Who is it—a lady?'

'Yes, sir! and please will you come directly, as she says her business will not wait.'

'How mysterious!' quoth Vivian, laughing as he walked leisurely up the stairs.

Jane lingered behind one moment to accost her mistress.

'You'd better come too, madam,' she said seriously, 'and bring Miss Farthingale with you, for it's Mrs. General Chasemore, and she's nearly wild with drink.'

The pallor of death seemed to overspread
Regina's beautiful features.

'What on earth can she have to say to
Vivian?' she demanded of Selina Farthingale.

'I cannot tell you, madam,' said Jane,
answering the question; 'but I wish you
would be present at the interview, for she
seems dead set against you, and declares she
is determined to tell the master all your
secrets.'

'Selina, for Heaven's sake come and stop
her tongue! The woman must have gone
mad!' exclaimed Regina, as she followed
Vivian up the stairs.

They all reached the boudoir together,
just as he was about to open the door. Mrs.
General Chasemore was seated in her chair
with her arms lolling on the table, and her
large eyes fixed upon the entrance. She was
very much excited by the wine she had taken,

but the shock of believing her fraud to be discovered, and herself in actual danger, had so far cleared her brain that she was quite capable of relating her story with coherence and determination.

‘ You here !’ exclaimed Vivian, as his eye fell upon the figure of his stepmother. ‘ I thought I had been sufficiently frank with you to prevent any further meeting between us !’

‘ Oh, Vivian ! you have been very cruel and unjust to me, I know that ; but you are your poor father’s own son, and I cannot stand by and see you deceived without raising my voice to tell you so.’

‘ What folly is this ?’ he demanded angrily.

‘ Mrs. Chasemore,’ interposed Regina, with trembling lips, ‘ had you not better come into the dressing-room with Selina and me ? You and Vivian never get on well together, you know !’

‘Don’t go,’ whispered the housemaid, ‘she only wants to prevent your speaking, and to ruin you !’

‘No, I won’t go !’ repeated the widow aloud. ‘I must speak—I won’t be ruined ! I never knew, Vivian, when I attended your wife in her illness, that the child was not her own. I thought, of course, that everything was right ; but now that I am told—who am I to say told me ?’ she asked in a loud aside of Jane, who stood behind her. But before the girl could answer, Regina had sprung like a wild cat at Mrs. General Chasemore.

‘You are mad !’ she said. ‘You don’t know what you are talking about—you’ve been drinking. Vivian, don’t let her speak ! Cannot you see that she is the worse for liquor ? It’s infamous—it’s disgraceful ! Why should creatures of this sort be allowed to enter the houses of decent people ?’

‘If this woman is here with the permission

of any one, you know it is not with mine,' said Vivian, sternly; 'but since she *is* here, Regina, I shall not refuse her the ordinary courtesy due to a visitor. Go on,' he continued, turning to his stepmother, 'and let me hear all you have to say.'

'No, no, no!' screamed his wife, losing control of herself. 'She shall not speak—I will kill her first!'

'Regina, for Heaven's sake command yourself!' interposed Selina. 'You will betray everything by such conduct.'

'Oh, of course they will try and stop my tongue, because they are both in the plot; but they shall not prevent my telling what I have heard. Vivian, that child is not your own!'

'*What!*' he cried vehemently.

'You needn't look like that. I mean that it's not yours, nor hers either. It's the child of a poor person that they've palmed upon you.'

'Merciful God!' said Vivian, in a very low voice, as he leant against the wall for support.

'You wicked old woman!' screamed Selina. 'It's every bit a lie, and you need not suppose that Mr. Chasemore will be such a fool as to believe you.'

'A lie! Why you bought the child yourself in Drury Lane, and paid a hundred pounds for it!'

'I never did! I never saw the child, nor Regina either, till six weeks after its birth, so *I* could have had no hand in it.'

'Oh, you false hussy! If I hadn't proofs against you, do you think I should be here? But I've found out all your wickedness, and Regina's too, and that's why I cannot hold my tongue any longer!'

'I thought you were present at the birth of the child,' said Vivian, in a voice still low with horror.

'So she was! she wrote and told you so

herself. 'She is only saying this now because she wants to make a quarrel between us, Vivian,' sobbed his wife. But he took no notice of her.

'It is a mistake,' continued Mrs. Chasemore. 'When I saw Regina at Pays-la-Reine, the infant was already there. She said it had been born during the night, and of course I believed her. She was so nervous about breaking the news to you, that I wrote that letter at her dictation, and if any one is answerable for the contents, it is herself.'

'How you have deceived me all round!' groaned Vivian.

'But surely you are not going to believe what this woman tells you?' exclaimed Regina. 'Ask her for her proofs, Vivian. Am I to be condemned in this horrible manner on the word of a drunken woman? Selina, tell him that it is false—that you know

she was present at the time the child was born.'

'I cannot say more than I have done,' replied Selina, sullenly; 'and I wish to goodness I had not been mixed up in the affair at all.'

'I dare say you do, miss,' observed the housemaid.

'Why, what have you to say in the matter?'

'Only that Mrs. General Chasemore gave me the whole history before your arrival, and, true or false, it is an awkward business to have one's name mentioned in connection with.'

'It is none of yours, anyway, so you can hold your tongue.'

'Mrs. Chasemore,' said Vivian, 'I cannot let the matter rest here. You say that the infant that I have been led to believe my own belongs to another person, and was bought

for a sum of money. That it was my wife and Miss Farthingale who connived to palm this wicked fraud on me, and that you knew nothing of the truth until lately. How did you discover it ?'

The widow was now at a nonplus, and Jane saw that she must come to the rescue, or she would be defeated. So, advancing to the table, she said in a firm, loud voice :

' It was I, Mr. Chasemore, who provided this lady with the requisite proofs.'

' *You!* Why, you are the housemaid's cousin, are you not ?'

' I entered your house in that capacity, in order that I might expose the hideous fraud that is going on here, with the attempt to rob Sir Arthur Chasemore of his future rights. I have the best proofs possible to lay before you. I know the mother of the child that is being nursed upstairs as your son and heir, and can produce her at any moment to

recognise it, and tell you under what circumstances she was deprived of it. I know the father who sold it to Miss Farthingale—the woman who assisted at its birth—the marks by which they can determine its identity; and if you are not satisfied with what you have heard, I will bring forward an array of witnesses against which there can be no appeal.'

'She knows everything!' cried Regina, as she hid her face from the angry eyes of her husband.

'And who may you be, who take such an interest in exposing this unhappy business?' demanded Vivian. The housemaid turned her eyes full upon Selina Farthingale. The moment of her final triumph had arrived.

'Good Heavens!' exclaimed that young lady, recognising her for the first time; 'it is Janet Oppenheim.'

'No, Miss Farthingale, you are mistaken!

I was Janet Oppenheim. I am the wife of Sir Arthur Chasemore.'

'My cousin's wife!' said Vivian; 'and you have stooped to fill the place of a menial in our establishment?'

'I have stooped, Mr. Chasemore, in order to defend my husband's rights. You could hardly expect me to sit down quietly and see a false son and heir nurtured for the inheritance which lawfully belongs to those who may come after him.'

Vivian Chasemore sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

'And I had learnt to love him so,' he said bitterly.

At that moment, a knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Fleming entered with a flurried air.

'Oh, if you please, ma'am, the baby's taken very ill with croup. I must have the doctor immediately. Will you please to order for him to be fetched at once?'

But no one answered her. Regina was lying face downwards on the sofa, and Vivian was sitting in an attitude of despair at the other end of the room.

‘Oh, please, sir! what am I to do?’ continued the nurse, appealing to her master.

‘Let him die!’ was the uncongenial answer.

‘Not so!’ said Lady Chasemore. ‘He has a mother who loves and values him. Order Thomas to go at once for Dr. Morton, nurse, and do everything you can for the baby till he arrives.’

‘Yes, I will. But is there anything wrong here, Jane?’ demanded Mrs. Fleming, as she looked round at the strangely assorted group in the boudoir.

‘Yes, very wrong. They have received bad news. You will hear it all by-and-by. But now you must go and look after the child,’ said Janet, as she thrust her from the room.

Vivian rose and went and stood before his wife.

‘Regina,’ he said, ‘tell me the truth! Is what we have heard a lie or not?’

‘Oh, Vivian! Vivian! I did it for your sake.’

‘Silence,’ he answered sternly, ‘and don’t add another falsehood to the horrible wrong you have done me. Did you buy that infant for a hundred pounds, and is the whole story of your having borne it at Pays-la-Reine a lie?’

‘They persuaded me to do it!’ she sobbed. ‘I should never have thought of it alone. But I imagined you were disappointed with me—and it seemed so hard that the money should go from us for want of a child to inherit—and so—and so—oh, Vivian! kill me, but do not look at me in that manner! I have never had one happy moment since I consented to deceive you.’

He turned from her contemptuously.

‘Lady Chasemore, I believe you told me you could produce the mother of this unfortunate child. How long will it take you to do so?’

‘Not an hour, Mr. Chasemore! I will take a cab and bring her back with me at once!’

‘Will you be good enough to do so, and let me know when she is here? Until then I have no wish to be disturbed. But the sooner this shameful business is completed, and my house cleansed from the stain of deceit that rests upon it, the better!’

So saying, he walked into his own dressing-room and locked the door behind him. The four women left in the boudoir looked at each other for the first time.

‘Well, miss, and a nice part you’ve played in this little game,’ observed Selina spitefully, as she met the eyes of Janet Chasemore.

‘What you think or do not think of my conduct, Miss Farthingale, is of no moment to me; but I shall be obliged if you will address me by my title in the future. It is not usual in society to call married women “miss.”’

‘I don’t know who you may have been,’ sighed Regina, ‘but I think you have done a most cruel and unjust thing, Lady Chase-more. And until you really produce the proofs you spoke of, I for one will not allow that child to be thrust from my house as an impostor.’

‘I don’t think you will have the option of choice, Mrs. Vivian,’ returned Janet, ‘for its mother will not let it remain here for an hour after she has seen it. But I must leave you now to amuse yourselves as best you may till my return. I see the old lady is more than half asleep, so I can trust her with safety to the mercy of your tongues. I am

quite aware that she lied all round ; but self-preservation is the first instinct of nature, and inculpating herself would not have saved you. It has been an awkward business from beginning to end, Mrs. Vivian, and next time you attempt to carry out an intrigue I should advise you to be more careful in your choice of confederates. *Au revoir.*'

And, with a light-hearted nod, Lady Chasemore left them to their own reflections, and whispered dread of what penalty they might be called upon to pay, now that their crime had been discovered. As she emerged upon the landing she was caught hold of by Mrs. Fleming.

'Oh lor, Jane ! where *is* the mistress ? The dear baby's awful bad. He's just been took with a fit, and I don't know as he'll hold out till the doctor comes ; and that wet-nurse is no manner of use at all. The master and mistress ought to be told at once.'

'Take my advice, nurse, and don't disturb them. They're in great trouble, and wish to be alone.'

'But they'll never let their own flesh and blood die without ever coming to have a look at him, surely.'

'Go back to the nursery, and don't leave it till I return. There is a great surprise in store for you, and you'll know it as soon as I come back again.'

'Oh dear! oh dear!' cried the nurse, wringing her hands; 'I do wish that there doctor would be quick and come.'

Lady Chasemore left the house without further delay, and drove at once to Clarence Lodge. The Christmas holidays were not yet over, and Miss Netherwood was staying in the country, so she experienced no difficulty in procuring Belton to return with her. She did not tell the girl positively that she had found her little boy, for fear a disappoint-

ment should be in store for her, but she enlightened her sufficiently, on their way to Premier Street, to make Bonnie's cheek glow and her blue eyes beam with the excitement of expectation. As they entered the hall, with its exotic flowers and marble statues, at which the girl gazed with unmitigated admiration, Thomas approached Lady Chasemore.

'I am afraid it's a bad job upstairs, Jane,' he whispered. 'The doctor has never left the nursery since he entered it, and the house is turned upside down for hot water and flannels.'

'Poor little fellow! I hope he'll get over it,' replied Janet, as she thought compassionately of the simple, blue-eyed mother who followed wonderingly in her wake. On her way to the nursery she stopped and knocked at Vivian's dressing-room.

'Mr. Chasemore, I have brought the witness I promised you. Am I to take her straight up to the nursery or not?'

At her appeal he rose slowly and unlocked the door and stood on the threshold, gazing at Janet with sorrowful eyes that showed traces of recent emotion. But before he had time to answer her, Bonnie had recognised him.

‘Oh !’ she called out suddenly, ‘it’s Mr. Alfred Waverley ;’ and then, without further prefix, she fell on her knees before him. ‘Oh, Mr. Waverley, I told her that you’d help me, though I never thought to see you here ! Oh, sir, try and find my baby ! I’ve suffered a deal since I married Kit Masters, and he stole the child from me ; but if miss and you can get him back, I think I could forgive all that’s gone before ! Oh, Mr. Waverley, sir, I never thought to see you !’

And then she lay trembling where she had cast herself, as the great fact of his actual presence rose up to try her courage. Vivian raised her from the floor and dragged her to

the window, where the fading light of the January afternoon made recognition more practicable.'

'Good God! is it really Bonnie? Why, my child, however did you find me out, and what have you to do in this house?'

'Miss Oppenheim brought me, sir,' said Bonnie, half alarmed at her own presumption; 'and I don't know what for, unless she has heard some news of my poor baby. Oh, miss, please don't keep me in suspense!' she continued, appealing to Janet. 'Let me know if there is any hope for me.'

'Yes, Belton, I have traced your child, though you will find him much altered from what he was when you parted with him. Mr. Chasemore, *this* is the mother of the infant upstairs!'

'*This!*' he repeated, wonderingly. '*Bonnie!* My God, was it not enough to wrong me as they have done, without making me the

unconscious injurer of this poor innocent girl ?'

Bonnie was looking vaguely from one to the other, unable to understand the import of Vivian's speech, when Dr. Morton came hastily down the nursery-stairs.

'Mr. Chasemore, I regret to tell you that the infant is very seriously ill. I think you had better come and see it. And would it not be as well to bring your wife with you ? She might reproach us afterwards for not having let her know.'

'All right, Morton ! I will do what is necessary. Take her upstairs,' he continued to Janet, pointing to where Bonnie, with dilated eyes, was listening to the doctor's statement.

'Is that my baby ?' gasped the girl ; 'is he dying ?'

'Oh ! I hope not. Come with me, Belton, and let us see,' said Janet, as they followed in the wake of the medical man.

Vivian had not meant to accompany them, but as Bonnie looked back beseechingly at him, some hope of sustaining her in the fresh trouble she had to undergo influenced him also to seek the nursery-floor. As they entered the room they saw the hapless little baby laid on a pillow upon Mrs. Fleming's lap, entirely prostrated by the convulsions it had passed through, and peacefully breathing out its last.

'Oh! Jane, my dear, I'm glad you've come, for it's a'most over with the poor lamb,' cried Mrs. Fleming as she caught sight of Lady Chasemore. But the next moment she was startled by seeing Bonnie spring forward and sink on her knees by the side of the dying infant.

'Oh! it *is*—it *is* my baby! See, miss, here is his little "pig's ear" that I told you of, and his dear little face has scarcely altered a bit. Oh! my boy—my boy!'

‘Who are you?’ demanded the nurse, querulously. ‘Get away, and don’t press so against the child. I can’t have the poor dear disturbed in his last moments.’

Bonnie’s violet eyes sought those of Vivian, appealingly.

‘Mr. Waverley!’

‘Fleming,’ he said authoritatively, ‘give the infant to that young woman! *She is his mother!*’

‘Sir!’ exclaimed the nurse in astonishment.

‘Do as I tell you! this is no moment for explanations. Morton, oblige me by saying nothing till it is all over.’

Mrs. Fleming laid the pillow deferentially on the lap of Bonnie, who had seated herself upon the ground to receive it, and joined the group who stood around her in instinctive awe of the silent messenger who folded his wings amongst them, even then.

'My little boy,' said Bonnie softly, in a strange voice that thrilled the bystanders; 'my little boy, will you know me again in Heaven? Oh! I never dreamt I should find you like this. I thought I should live all my weary life, darling, without seeing you again, and that you'd be a big strong man when I was an old woman, and it is very strange to think that you are going home before me! Oh! my little angel—stop! I have nothing but you in the wide world! Don't go and leave me all alone. Baby—baby! don't look so blue and pinched. Oh! sir,' to the doctor, 'do you think if I were to lay him next my bosom that he would grow warm again?'

'No, poor soul! don't do that. You will only make him die the sooner.'

'Can nothing save him? Sir! he is my only one, and we have been parted so long. Is there nothing else that we can do? I

know you must be clever. Cannot you save this little child for me ?'

'Indeed, I cannot—or I would ! It is God's will that he should leave us. You must try and be patient and submit.'

'Oh ! I *have* been patient. Indeed, Mr. Waverley, I have. I have had so many troubles since you left us, sir, and this seems the worst of all. Oh ! baby darling, I am your mother ! Open your eyes and look at me just once before you go.'

And, as if in answer to her agonised appeal, the little child did open his eyes for a single instant, before the film of death passed over them, and he was gone.



CHAPTER X.

‘I AM GLAD YOU LOVED HIM.’

As soon as they found that they could make their escape without being noticed, Selina Farthingale and Mrs. General Chasemore had slipped downstairs and quitted the house. But Regina, left to herself, was anxious and irritable, and hearing an unusual bustle overhead, became curious to ascertain the cause, and pushed her way into the nursery.

‘Why have you all assembled here?’ she inquired. ‘What is the matter?’

‘*That* is the matter,’ replied her husband sternly, as he pointed to the dead child upon Bonnie’s lap; ‘there lies the infant who

might have been alive and well at this moment had you not torn it from its mother's breast with your cursed hundred pounds !

'*Dead!*' she exclaimed in a tone of horror.

Then Bonnie perceived that she was childless, and sprung to her feet, clasping the little body to her bosom.

'Are *you* the woman that robbed me?' she cried fiercely to Regina. 'Is it you who persuaded that cruel man to sell his own flesh and blood? Oh! Mr. Waverley,' she continued pathetically to Vivian, 'tell me *you* had no hand in this matter; *you* wouldn't have wronged me, after all the years that we have spent together?'

'Indeed, dear Bonnie, I would not! I never knew nor heard of this foul transaction till to-day. I have been wronged, poor child, almost as much as yourself, for I was taught to believe that poor little one belonged to me, and I loved it dearly—dearly!'

'I am glad you loved it,' she answered in a low voice. 'I am glad, since I was to lose my baby, that it came to you. I know you have been kind and good to it—as you was to me—but oh! Mr. Waverley, 'tis very hard to find it only to lose it again.'

'We all know that, Belton,' interposed Lady Chasemore, 'and we feel for you in your disappointment; but even this is better than the uncertainty you laboured under before.'

'Yes, miss, perhaps it is; but I can't find it in my heart to forgive them as committed such a cruel robbery upon me!'

She resigned the little body into the hands of Mrs. Fleming as she spoke, and let her arms drop languidly by her side.

Dr. Morton had taken up his hat and left the house, since there was nothing more to detain him there; and the servants, guessing the true state of affairs from the conversation

they had overheard, were very compassionate in their manner to Bonnie.

‘Let me take him, dear!’ whispered the nurse into her ear. ‘He’s been tended like a prince all his lifetime, and he shall be laid out and buried like a prince—and that I’m sure the master will promise you.’

‘I never knew the child belonged to you!’ said Regina, fixing her scared eyes upon the stranger.

‘Perhaps not, ma’am; but you knew you were robbing some poor mother of her rights. And what did you do it for? What’s the good of children unless they’re our own? Just for the sake of dressing him up in ribbons and laces like a toy, you’ve broke my heart!’ replied Bonnie, sobbing.

‘I’ve nearly broken my own heart, too,’ she answered.

‘Do you want to compare your grief to mine?’ cried the bereaved mother. ‘Did

you carry him in your bosom for months, amid such trouble as you've never dreamed of, and thought nothin' of kicks nor cuffs, for the sake of the little one that was comin'; and then after you'd brought it into the world, and gone through that dreadful pain and sufferin', and was ready to forget it all for the joy of the baby, to have it stole away from your side and sold like a slave to strangers? Have you ever had a child yourself?" continued Bonnie, startling Regina with the unexpected question.

'No!' she faltered.

'I thought not. There's no mother's heart in your bosom, or you'd never have done such a wickedness. There's only one thing I'm thankful for—that he never lived long enough to call you by the name you've got no right to! It's better to think of him in his coffin than to live to see that!'

'Oh, Vivian! can you hear every one turn

against me, and not give me one word of comfort ?' cried the wretched Regina.

'Don't appeal to me!' he answered coldly. 'My only doubt is whether I shall be justified in not prosecuting you openly for this fraud, lest I should be suspected of having had a hand in it. Don't speak to me or look at me! You have inflicted a more grievous wound upon my heart than you will ever have it in your power to heal.'

'Oh, merciful God, have pity on me!' moaned the poor girl, as she cast herself upon the bed. 'My punishment is greater than I can bear !'

'You have brought it on your own head, Regina. Your real motives in attempting to cheat me and the world, as you have done, are best known to yourself ; but if they were, as you have hinted, to win back my affection, they have utterly failed. I will never live with you again after to-day !'

'Vivian, Vivian! have mercy on me!'
'What mercy have you shown to me or to this unfortunate mother? I can never think of you again but as of one whose hands are stained with the blood of that innocent babe! Pray to God for forgiveness, if you will. You have none to look for from me! Mrs. Fleming, you will see that everything necessary for the interment of the child is carried out with the same care as though he were what he has been supposed to be—my son. Poor little one!' continued Vivian, as he stooped to kiss the marble forehead of the dead infant; 'I could not have loved you more had you been mine!'

Then he turned on his heel and left the room, without another word.

'He is gone!' cried Regina; 'and he will never return again! Oh, Vivian! Oh, my husband! I love him so! I wish I had been dead before I attempted to deceive him!'

At these words, uttered in a tone of despair, the sweet, pitiful heart of Bonnie was stirred to compassion. She walked up to the bed, and stood sorrowfully by Regina's side.

'Poor lady! I don't think you meant to hurt me.'

'Indeed, indeed, I didn't! How could I tell the child was yours? And they told me that the man seemed so ready to part with it! I thought it was doing him a kindness.'

'I have seen your face before: once in Bond Street, when you spoke gently to me; and once when you were married to *him*. Don't cry so terribly! He will be sure to come back again.'

'Oh no, he won't. This is the second time I have driven him from me, and I know it will be the last. But it will kill me! I cannot live without him!'

'You shall not. I will follow and send him back to you.'

‘*You!* How can *you* persuade Vivian against his will?’

‘You call him by another name than what I knew him as ; but I am Bonnie, whom he knew so well and was so kind to for four years, and I am sure that he will let me speak to him.’

She walked up to her dead baby and kissed it just where Vivian had left the impress of his lips.

‘Good-bye!’ she whispered, with sobbing breath ; ‘good-bye ! I am so glad *he* loved you ! We shall meet him again, by-and-by, in heaven !’

Then she turned to leave the room.

‘Belton, where are you going?’ demanded Lady Chasemore.

‘Back to Clarence Lodge, miss ; but I have a little business to do first. No, don’t come with me. I would rather be alone.’

When she had reached the landing she

retraced her steps, and again approached Regina's bed.

'I forgive you, poor lady!' she murmured, with trembling lips. 'I am sure that you was kind to him, and I forgive you!'

Then they heard her faltering feet descend the staircase, and they were left alone with the dead child and their own thoughts.

* * * * *

Of course the news of the baby's death and the discovery involved in it reached the ears of Lady William Nettleship, in some miraculous manner, almost as soon as they had occurred, and brought her to Premier Street the next morning, eager after a dish of scandal. The old woman resembled the eagle only in one particular—that where the carrion carcase lay, there would she gather with her particular friends to discuss it in all its bearings.

Regina, having been left alone by every-

body (Lady Chasemore, even, having taken her departure to the arms of her lord and master), had passed a miserable night, full of fear and horrible conjecture, and was still lying languidly in her bed, when, to her dismay, her mother was ushered into her presence. Then she knew what she might expect, and felt all her sorrow change to desperation, like a wild animal driven to bay.

‘Dear me, Regina,’ exclaimed Lady William, looking like a bird of evil omen as she sat by the bedside shaking her paralytic head at her daughter. ‘I am shocked to hear from Thomas that the poor child’s really gone, though if what people are saying is true, it is just as well perhaps that it should be out of the way. What *is* this dreadful story I hear about his not being your child at all? I came over expressly to ask you. My housemaid met your cook last

evening, and she was full of it. Of course it's untrue, but it's very unpleasant. How on earth did it get about? Vivian must have it contradicted at once.'

Regina trembled with agitation. She knew it would be useless to attempt to deceive Lady William on a point which sooner or later must be public property, and therefore she determined to brave it out and carry it off with a high hand.

'Vivian will not take any trouble in the matter,' she replied, with affected carelessness, 'and for the very good reason that the story is perfectly true. The child was not mine. I adopted it!'

'*Not yours!*' screamed her mother in a shrill falsetto. 'Do you mean to tell me that the whole account of your being confined at that outlandish place in Normandy, and nearly dying except for the assistance of that horrid creature the dowager, was a

myth? Why, if that is the case, you and she must be two of the most infamous liars in creation.'

'Come, mamma! don't call names! I never stood your lectures very meekly in days gone by, you know, and late events have not improved my temper. Vivian has been the most to suffer in this business, and no one else has any right to find fault with me.'

'But I won't admit that he is the greatest sufferer. You have made a fool of me and of all the world. The idea of picking up a dirty brat out of the gutter and passing it off as your own! And I actually spent three pounds on a robe for the little animal. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to rob your mother in such a manner.'

'Well, mamma, we will be quits on that matter. I will pay you back the three

pounds, with compound interest, if you think it necessary.'

'But what did you do it for? What possible object can you have had in attempting to palm a beggar's brat upon society as your own child. That is what puzzles me,' said Lady William Nettleship.

Regina rose up in her bed like an avenging angel.

'What did I do it for?' she repeated witheringly; 'how can you sit there and put such a question to me? Ask yourself, rather. Why did you rear me to consider wealth as the only thing worth striving for in this world, and poverty the greatest evil that can befall mankind? Why did you force me, by the example of your own life, to attribute every mean and dirty action to the effects of want of money, to believe that without it one must necessarily sink to the level of such women as Mrs. Runnymede and Mrs. Stingo,

and that by its aid alone one could afford to satisfy one's tastes and indulge in society consonant to one's feelings ?

'Oh ! of course, abuse your poor mother because she doesn't happen to be quite so rich as yourself. That is like your usual gratitude, and when it is all through my means that you are established at all.'

'Through your means—yes ! I acknowledge your assistance so far, mother,' said Regina bitterly. 'Through your means I was sold like a horse or a heifer to bring misery and ruin into a good man's home and turn the heart that used to love me into a well of contempt.'

'Do you mean to say you were not as eager to catch him as ever I could have been ?' demanded Lady William. 'Why, everybody knows you flung yourself at his head from the first day you saw him.'

‘I don’t deny it! I was an apt pupil, and learnt the lessons you had taught me but too well.’

‘I never taught you to be a fool! Having got the man, why couldn’t you be content with him?—instead of mixing in a low intrigue of this sort, which you must have known would be found out.’

‘Because you have never left off taunting me with the fact of my childlessness. We have never met but what you have planted some sting in my breast by your allusions to the uncertainty of my prospects in the future, and my folly in marrying without proper settlements. You have worked me up to such a pitch sometimes, that I have felt almost frenzied to think that the day might come when I should find myself as impoverished as yourself and compelled to sink to the same level. Oh, mother! if you knew how I loathe the life you lead—with

your cards and wine parties, and your rouge and false hair and demi-rep friends—you would believe me when I say that I would kill myself sooner than return to it.'

'My demi-rep friends indeed! You had better be a little more cautious in your choice of words, Regina, unless you wish to be indicted for libel. And pray what do you call such ladies as Mrs. General Chase-more?'

'Nothing better! But I was forced into her society, and when we shared this horrid secret, I could not drop it. If I had only taken my husband's advice from the beginning, all this would never have been.'

'Oh! you are going on another tack now, I suppose, and about to become everything that is admirable in domestic life! Really, Regina, you should have joined your husband's profession and gone on the stage.

You would have made a most versatile actress !'

'Mamma, you shall not sneer at me. You may blame me as you like—you may call me all that is deceitful and cold-hearted and avaricious—you cannot say worse than I have deserved, but there is one spot in my heart that shall be sacred even from you, and that is the grief I experience at having only just discovered how much I love him.'

'Hoity-toity!' said Lady William, scrambling to her feet as Regina's tears began to flow fast. 'If you are going to treat me to any sentimentality, my dear, I will take my departure. You have not been so over-polite to me this morning that you can expect me to bear patiently with the lachrymose mood in which you evidently contemplate indulging. I told you you were a fool, just now, and so you are. Any woman who lets herself be

found out 'is a fool. But I didn't give you credit for such an extreme of folly as this. You had better ring the bell for Mr. Chase-more. He is the proper person to dry your tears. I should only be accused of hypocrisy if I attempted to do so.'

'He is not here. He has left me, and in all probability I shall never see him again,' said Regina. 'He has found out that it was my cursed ambition that led me to marry him, and he will not believe now that my false heart is capable of such a thing as love.'

'How very romantic!' sneered Lady William. 'But it really shocks me to hear you swear so. If these are the morals of Premier Street, I really think that the sooner I return to my "demi-rep" friends the better. They, at all events, are not in the habit of using oaths to enforce their arguments.'

'Oh, go! go!' cried Regina passionately. 'Every word you say is a fresh aggravation to me. I will not answer for myself if you remain here longer.'

And so Lady William shuffled out of her daughter's bed-room and went down to the lower floor, where she summoned the servants in turn, and having extracted all the details of the scandal from their lips, proceeded to make a tour of the houses of her most intimate friends to retail what she had heard to them.

And meanwhile her unhappy daughter lay on her pillow with her face downwards, wondering if she should ever see Vivian again, and if so, what words she could use in order to make him believe she loved him.

On the same day, and about the same hour, Mr. Farthingale, seated in his private office in the city, was handed the card of Sir Arthur

Chasemore. Now his daughter Selina, for reasons of her own, had studiously avoided giving him any intimation of what had taken place in Premier Street the day before, preferring that the circumstances of the case should come to his knowledge their own way. He was, therefore, quite unprepared for seeing the baronet enter the office with a lady on his arm.

‘God bless my soul, Miss Oppenheim ! This is very unexpected indeed !’ he said fussily, as he set chairs for his visitors.

‘The lady has changed her name, Mr. Farthingale. Allow me to introduce you to Lady Chasemore.’

The little lawyer stared in mute astonishment.

‘Your wife, Sir Arthur?’ he stammered at last.

‘My wife, Mr. Farthingale, as fast as the law can make her. And therefore you will

not be surprised that we have come here this morning on business. As Lady Chasemore's husband, I am entitled to ask you how soon you intend to settle up the affairs of her late aunt, Mrs. Mather.'

'I really don't understand you, Sir Arthur; I believe there is a little something due to Miss Oppen—I mean Lady Chasemore—and when I have time to look into the matter, I will let you have an official statement; but——'

'You must be good enough to *make* time, Mr. Farthingale; and I fancy when you go regularly to work you will find that the "little something" is more than you imagine. Here is a letter from Lady Chasemore's uncle in Bombay, in which he states that his sister left various sums of money, chiefly in railway scrip, amounting in all to some sixteen or eighteen thousand pounds, and that the papers must necessarily be in the hands of her solicitor.'

'This is most extraordinary,' said Mr. Farthingale, growing very red. 'Who is this Bombay uncle? I never heard of him before.'

'Perhaps not, Mr. Farthingale,' interposed the silvery tones of Lady Chasemore. 'My aunt had quarrelled with him for many years, and never mentioned his name; but I knew it, and finding you were so very long in settling her affairs, I wrote and asked his advice as to what I had better do.'

'Why did you not apply to me, Lady Chasemore? You know that ever since the death of your lamented aunt, I have only been too anxious to lend you every assistance in my power,' said the lawyer, with much confusion.

'Oh! of course I know you were very good in procuring me an under-teacher's place at Clarence Lodge, and promising, if possible, to save a little money for me out of the wreck of poor auntie's fortune; but I have

been waiting for it three years, Mr. Farthingale, and so both I and Sir Arthur think it is about time we were provided with a statement on the matter.'

'What scrip is in your possession belonging to Lady Chasemore?' demanded the baronet sternly. 'I have no intention of leaving this office until I know, Mr. Farthingale.'

'Oh! really, Sir Arthur, I hope you won't be hard on me. I have had so much business of importance on my hands lately, that I have had time to think of nothing else. This scrip had to be sold out and collected, Sir Arthur, for I never imagined that Miss Oppen—I mean Lady Chasemore—would continue to trouble herself with shares; and being so comfortably situated as I believed with Miss Netherwood, I thought a little delay would be of minor consequence. However, if you wish it——'

'Call your clerk in at once, sir, and let us see Mrs. Mather's will.'

The lawyer, trembling with agitation, was compelled to produce the document in question, which was spread out upon the table and carefully examined.

'Why, here is a matter of sixteen thousand pounds, producing an income of eight hundred per annum, invested in six companies, the scrip of which is in your possession. What have you to say for yourself, Mr. Farthingale, for having kept silence on this subject for three years ?'

'Indeed, Sir Arthur, I had nothing but Miss Oppen—Lady Chasemore's—interests at heart in delaying the selling out of these shares. The times have been very hard, and she would have lost a considerable sum of money on them.'

'And her income ?'

'Oh, the income is all right !' replied Mr. Farthingale, with a forced attempt at great

merriment. ‘I felt myself in the position of this dear lady’s father, you know, Sir Arthur, and exerted the parental privilege of laying by a nest-egg against her marriage—which I shall be most truly happy to make over into the hands of so worthy a recipient as Sir Arthur Chasemore.’

‘Very considerate of you, I am sure. You will be good enough, then, to pay the sum of two thousand four hundred pounds, with interest, into my bankers’—Messrs. Calvin and Co.—and to deliver over the scrip in your possession to my solicitor, Mr. Faithful, of Nathan Street, Holborn.’

‘Mr. Faithful your solicitor, Sir Arthur! Do I understand that you intend to take your monetary affairs out of my hands?’

‘Take my affairs out of your hands, you scoundrel!’ cried the baronet, in a fury. ‘I should think I did! And you may consider yourself deuced lucky that I don’t kick you out of your own office into the bargain.’

'The law, Sir Arthur! the law!' remonstrated the red-haired little lawyer, as he got behind a chair.

'D——n the law—you cheat! If you don't pay in that two thousand four hundred pounds with due interest to Calvin's this afternoon, and Faithful does not receive the scrip at the same time, you shall have more of the law than you will like; for I'll indict you for retaining my wife's money with intent to defraud her of it. So you may take your choice between prompt payment or a trial for swindling;' and so saying, Sir Arthur swung out of the office with Janet, smiling serenely, on his arm. She had only one regret connected with the interview—that Selina had not been present at it. Mr. Farthingale slunk home that evening in the most abject spirits.

'We are ruined, Selina,' he said; 'we are ruined. I've had to refund the whole of

Janet Oppenheim's money with interest, and I haven't enough capital left to carry on my business with.'

'More fool you to let the minx outwit you!' was the filial reply. 'Sir Arthur's got a bargain! I wish him joy of it.'

'So you know they are married!' said her father. 'When did you hear of it?'

Thereupon she told him of the disclosures that had taken place in Premier Street the day before, concealing, as was natural to so evil a nature, her own share in the transactions, but liberally abusing Mrs. General Chasemore and Regina for their mutual deceit and fraud.

'Mrs. Chasemore!' quoth Mr. Farthingale; 'the general's widow. You don't mean to tell me that you've quarrelled with her, Selina?'

'Quarrelled with her! I should think I had. The vulgar, dissipated, foul-tongued

old woman. I never mean to speak to her again. Why, she called me a hussy !'

' And I have promised to marry her !' groaned the little lawyer.

' *What?*' exclaimed his daughter. ' Have you been spending your evenings with that horrid creature, and has she entrapped you into an engagement ? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, at your age. But do not imagine that I shall remain here to be ruled over by such as she. You must give me a separate allowance, and I shall leave the house and live by myself.'

' It is not in my power, Selina. I have not been quite candid with you with regard to my income, hoping that you might marry well, and become independent of me. But it is almost all gone, and you and Mrs. General Chasemore will have to make the best of what remains to us.'

And the ‘best’ was very bad indeed for the rest of their joint lives.

* * * * *

When Bonnie crept downstairs from the room in which the body of her dead infant lay, Vivian had already closed the hall-door, and gone forth into the bleak January evening by himself.

The girl’s only instinct was to follow him, though with what purpose she scarcely knew. The hope of finding her child, which had barely had time to kindle before it was extinguished, had left a sore dull aching at her heart; but that feeling was nothing compared to her fear of the danger which seemed to threaten the man whom she knew only by the name of Alfred Waverley. She had been witness to his anger and remorse—she had heard his last passionate words to his wife—his avowed determination never to return home again; and a vague dread possessed

her that he meant to throw himself into the river, as she had done in her great pain, and that at all hazards she must follow and bring him back. With that idea she passed through the hall again (never giving a thought now to the beautiful objects that had entranced her eyes on her entrance) and gazed from one end of the street to the other. There had been a fall of snow some days previously, succeeded by a hard frost that had made the roads and pavements very slippery, and the sky was overcast by a uniform tinge of grey, rendered darker by the fast coming night. As Bonnie stood there, straining her sight to discover some glimpse of her friend, the cold winter blast lifted the shawl she wore, and blew her fair hair into her eyes. At last she caught sight of his figure crossing into Great Portland Street, and set off as fast as the slippery state of the pavements would permit her, in pursuit of him—up the

Marylebone Road as far as Baker Street, where Vivian suddenly dived into the dry-land Avernus that does duty for a station in that district. Panting and breathless, keeping her shawl as well as she could around her with one hand, whilst she held on her little black bonnet with the other, Bonnie pushed her way amidst the crowd after him. Once she was stopped in her career by the demand for a ticket, which she had entirely forgotten to take, and she had to run back with all speed to the booking-office, fearful lest Vivian should have left the platform before she gained it. When the clerk asked her for what station she required her ticket, she answered, ‘anywhere,’ in a tone which made him remark saucily that it wasn’t the line for Hanwell. But when she explained to him that she only wished to speak to some one on the platform, he gave her a third-class for Portland Road, and let her go

in peace. She tore down the steps like a mad creature, and on first entering the station, thought she was too late. But it was only the pitchy darkness—the clouds of steam—the noise of arriving and departing trains, and the hoarse announcements of the porters, that had confused her. Vivian apparently had not yet made up his mind where to go, for presently her eyes discerned him in the further corner of the platform, gazing moodily at some advertisements, and in another moment she was at his side.

‘Mr. Waverley!’ she said, plucking his sleeve to attract his attention. ‘Mr. Waverley! Oh, pray speak to me!’

The gaze that met hers was full of astonishment.

‘Bonnie, my poor child! what made you follow me here? What do you want of me?’

‘Oh, Mr. Waverley, pray come home!’

‘I have no home, child! Home is a place where there is love and confidence, and mutual respect. I have long ceased to look for them in my house, and I never mean to return to it.’

‘Oh, don’t say that, sir! I was very bad once, when Kit took my poor baby from me, and I went and throwed myself right into the river; but the gentlemen at the hospital showed me how wrong I had been, and made me promise never to do it any more. You won’t do anything of that sort, will you, Mr. Waverley?’

‘No, no, Bonnie! Men have a different method of drowning their grief. And so you suffered, poor girl, even to the point of desperation, and never let me know? How was that? Did you think I had ceased to be your friend because you had lost sight of me?’

‘Oh no, sir! but poor grandmother (she

died last year, Mr. Waverley) used allays to tell me that a grief that can't be cured must be endured. And who could have cured mine? Only I ought to have endured it more patiently. And then I knew you were married, sir——' with a little tremble in her voice——‘ and I thought you had forgot all about such poor folks as grandmother and me !’

‘Indeed, Bonnie, you are mistaken, although I deserve the reproach! I have never forgotten you, nor the days I passed in those little rooms in Drury Lane; and I have often wished I was there again, for I have not been very happy since I left them. God forgive me for not having found you out sooner, and learned all that was happening to you! I might have prevented this foul business altogether had I done so.’

‘Don't speak of that again, Mr. Waverley, sir! Don't let it fret you. I know you feel

for me, losing my poor baby, but no one's so much to blame for it as Kit. It was his wickedness from beginning to end, and I don't think your lady meant to harm me, Mr. Waverley, nor yet yourself, when you come to look at it in that light.'

' Didn't mean to harm *me*, Bonnie! Why, how could she have harmed me more than by trying to make me rear another person's child as my own? Making me waste my holiest affections, too,' he continued, in a broken voice, 'on an infant that had no claim to them.'

' But oh, sir, she did it for the love of you. Can't you read a woman's mind better than that? She thought you despised her for being childless, and that your love was weaning from her. It was very, very wrong, sir, and foolish into the bargain, but she's lying on her bed now, weeping fit to break her heart, and it's only you that will be able to comfort her.'

'She must look for comfort elsewhere! I can never forgive her!'

'Don't say that, Mr. Waverley. We've all got too many sins of our own to dare to say that of a fellow creature. Why, I wouldn't dare to say it myself, even of Kit. I never want to see his face again, but I do hope the Lord will forgive him, as I do, for he'll have a miserable enough heart to grow old upon, even with that.'

'You are too good for me, Bonnie, and a thousand times too good for Kit! But tell me now (since you have mentioned him) is there nothing that I can do to bring you together again ?

'Oh no, sir, thank you. I think I must have been living on the hope of finding my baby, for now that that's over, I feel as if my life was over too, and there was nothing left to live for. Only if you would grant me a favour, Mr. Waverley !'

‘I will do anything for you in my power, Bonnie.’

‘Go home to your lady, sir. I know she loves you truly, though she may not have shown it. Her sobs went to my very heart. I would rather be myself, as I stand at this moment, than she—poor thing—for she’s poorer than I am if she’s lost your love.’

‘And what am I to say to her if I *do* go, Bonnie?’

The girl’s voice sunk to a solemn whisper.

‘Tell her, sir, that you forgive her, free and open, for what she’s done, if so be ’twas done for the love of you. And teach her, sir, to pray for God’s forgiveness before yours, and who knows but what He may send a blessing on you still, and a child of your own to inherit all your riches?’

‘Ah, Bonnie, you set me too hard a task.’

‘I don’t think so, sir. I think it’s what your own heart is longing to do, if your pride

would only let it. I am sure you must love her—such a beautiful lady and so sad, and who may be the mother of your children yet—and you will never be happy yourself until there is peace between you.'

'I don't expect any happiness in this world.'

'Oh! Mr. Waverley, there may be plenty for you—I pray God from the bottom of my heart there may—if you will only set about the right way to get it. But perhaps your poor lady has never had a good mother to teach her what is right and what is wrong, or where to go for help and comfort when she needs it.'

Vivian thought of Lady William Nettleship, and shuddered.

'I am afraid she hasn't, Bonnie.'

'They used to call me "daft," Mr. Waverley, and I do think I have never been quite so ready as some folks, but since I

threw myself into the river and went to the hospital, things seem to have become a bit clearer to me than they used to be, and I can see how difficult it must be for people to throw off the teachings of their childhood. You've felt that yourself, haven't you, sir ?'

'Yes, Bonnie, I have.'

'Then promise me you'll be a teacher to your lady. Mothers' lessons are very hard to unlearn, but when a woman loves truly, her husband can make her do it if he has a mind to. Oh, sir, do promise me !'

'To go back to poor Regina ?'

'Yes, and never to leave her again. Oh ! you don't know the hard thoughts that creep up in a woman's heart when her husband is unkind to her. It seems as if everything was lost. And you will go back this night or early to-morrow, won't you, sir, and forgive everything (as you hope the blessed Lord will forgive you at the last), and take

her in your arms and tell her that is her home for evermore ?'

' I will, Bonnie. But tell me, why do you take such an interest in my domestic life ?'

The girl had been talking fast and with much excitement until now, but as Vivian put this question, all her courage seemed suddenly to evaporate.

' I don't know,' she broke down, sobbing ; ' I can't tell, I'm sure ; only I know'd you so well, sir, and you were allays very kind to me, and my own life seems to be well-nigh over.'

She was wiping the tears from her eyes with a corner of her shawl, when the railway-bell and a fresh rush of people on the platform showed that another train was close at hand.

As the crowd circled around them Bonnie made a last effort to bind Vivian to his word.

' *Promise* me !' she said earnestly, as she

grasped him by the arm—‘by the living God, *promise* me !’

‘I promise !’ he replied as earnestly.

But at that juncture, just as the ponderous engine with its eyes of fire came rolling through the tunnel with a shrill whistle, a couple of rough men rushed between and parted them. Vivian was standing at the edge of the platform with his back to the train, and the sudden impetus, joined to the slippery condition of the soles of his boots, threw him off his balance, and in another moment he would have fallen on the lines. The danger was imminent, but occurred so instantaneously that no eyes saw it but those that were watching him so hungrily. With the cry of a mother who sees her child in the jaws of death, Bonnie sprang forward, and catching Vivian, in the very act of falling, by some part of his dress, swung him with a force born of desperation behind her, and fell

prone upon the lines herself. A universal scream of terror from the bystanders, and a series of shouts from the guards, rose to mark the accident; but the engine, with its long train of carriages, rolled slowly but surely on, until they occupied the length of the station.

Vivian, who had been thrown on the platform himself by the determination with which he had been rescued, did not know what had happened, until they dragged the mutilated body of the poor girl, who had given her life for his, from beneath the wheels of the railway carriages. Then, horror-struck so as to prevent speech, he viewed the misshapen mass that had been so fair and straight but a few seconds before, and felt all his manhood shaken at the exclamations that went on around him.

Women were shrieking and fainting at the horrible sight: men were running here and

there in search of a doctor or a stretcher : and the officials, with deep commiseration in their faces and heartfelt pity in their tones, were doing all they could by means of stimulants to see if there was any life left in that poor crushed and bleeding body.

And Vivian knelt there, gazing in speechless dismay at the white face that the cruel wheels had spared, and thinking of every innocent way in which the girl had shown her affection for him, from the first day he met her until now.

‘ She is quite gone ! ’ said the guard.

‘ And little else to be expected,’ remarked a porter, ‘ when the poor thing’s crushed to a jelly ! How ever did it happen ? ’

‘ Can’t say, I’m sure. Got too near to the edge, I suppose. They *will* do it ! ’

‘ Hush ! ’ said Vivian ; ‘ hush ! she is opening her eyes.’

The misty, dreamy purple orbs, which had

done more than their fair share in gaining poor Bonnie the sobriquets of 'daft' and 'wandering,' unclosed themselves slowly and wonderingly, as though she marvelled to find she was still in this world.

'How do you feel, poor dear?' cried a sympathetic lady, who stood by weeping.

'*Promise!*' she uttered with difficulty, as she fixed her eyes on Vivian.

'*I promise!*' he replied, solemnly as before.

'Couldn't she take a little drop of something now, porter, if you were to raise her head?' inquired the sympathetic lady, tendering a pocket-flask.

'Better not move her, mum, till the doctor's come,' was the porter's reply.

Once more the violet eyes opened, as though the effort to raise the lids were almost beyond nature, whilst the faintest smile flickered about the leaden-coloured lips.

'I—am—glad—you—loved—him!' she

gasped ; and, with a sudden jerk, threw her head back and died.

‘ It’s hover ! ’ said the guard.

* * * * *

No, Guard ! not over !—nor ever will be over whilst time lasts. For Bonnie’s death brought life into that desolate home in Premier Street, and united two hearts that might have drifted apart for ever.

THE END.

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